

# Screen

# S

Volume 40 number 3 Autumn 1999



**Special issue:**

**Space/place, city and film**

**The body and the city**

**Myths of the city**

**Time, space and vision**

**The Godard dossier**

**Subscription & order information:**

**Screen** (ISSN 0036-9543) is published quarterly in March, June, September, December by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. Annual subscription price for institutions of UK and Europe £££, USA and Rest of the World US\$122. Personal subscribers £36 for UK and Europe and US\$61 USA and Rest of the World and for Students and Unemployed UK and Europe £25, USA and Rest of the World US\$45. **Screen** is distributed by Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey, N.J. 07001, USA. Periodical postage paid at Newark, New Jersey, USA and additional entry points.

US POSTMASTER: send address changes to **Screen**, c/o Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey, N.J. 07001, USA.

Payment is required with all orders and subscriptions are accepted and entered by the volume(s). Payment may be made by the following methods: Cheque (made payable to Oxford University Press), National Girobank (Account 500 1056), Credit Card (Access, Visa, American Express, Diners Club), UNESCO Coupons, Bankers: Barclays Bank plc, PO Box 333, Oxford Code 20-65-18, Account 00715654. Individual rates apply only when copies are sent to a private address and are paid for by personal cheque or credit card.

Please send orders and requests for sample copies to: Journals Subscriptions Department, Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP. Telex: 837730 OXPRESE; Fax: 01865 267444.

© 1998 The John Logie Baird Centre. No article may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system without the permission in writing of the editors and the publisher. **Screen** incorporates

**Screen Education**

ISSN 0036-9543

**editors**

John Caughie  
Simon Frith  
Norman King  
Annette Kuhn  
Karen Lury  
Jackie Stacey

**reports and debates editor**

Simon Frith

**reviews editor**

Karen Lury

**editorial assistant**

Caroline Beven

**editorial advisory board**

William Boddy (USA)  
Annette Brauerhoch (Germany)  
Giuliana Bruno (Italy/USA)  
Charlotte Brunsdon (UK)  
Alison Butler (UK)  
Barbara Creed (Australia)  
Sean Cubitt (UK)  
Alan Durant (UK)  
Dimitris Eleftheriotis (UK)  
John Fletcher (UK)  
Claudia Gorbman (USA)  
Catherine Grant (UK)  
Sandra Kemp (UK)  
Myra Macdonald (UK)  
Will Straw (Canada)  
Gillian Swanson (Australia)  
Ravi Vasudevan (India)  
Ginette Vincendeau (UK)  
Kristen Whissel (UK)

**editorial address**

The Editors, **Screen**  
The John Logie Baird Centre  
University of Glasgow  
Glasgow G12 8QQ  
screen@arts.gla.ac.uk

**information on **Screen** on web site:**

<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/tfts/Screen.html>  
<http://www.oup.co.uk/Screen>

## Making connections

KAREN LURY and DOREEN MASSEY

*As the theme of this special issue of Screen is Space/Place/City and Film, I thought it would be interesting, in lieu of a formal editor's introduction, to establish a 'conversation' between myself, as a representative of film and television studies, and a prominent scholar in the field of geography. It is an attempt to echo the kinds of interaction that have been taking place at a theoretical level between scholars in these fields for some time. I particularly wanted to find out how useful this cross-fertilization has been from a geographer's point of view, and to find out what limitations and possibilities they might identify. I was very pleased when Doreen Massey, Professor in Geography at the Open University, agreed to participate. We decided early on not to limit our focus to the articles in this issue but to approach a series of questions about spaces, places and cities and their relationship to both film and television. The introduction of television was important, partly because my own research is mainly in this area, but also because it tempers, to a degree, the exclusive focus on film of the other articles in this issue. What follows is a series of observations and responses conducted – appropriately enough – not face to face, but through the fax machine, one of those electronic technologies that have (for some) radically altered the experience of time and space in the modern world. KL.*

**KL:** An emphasis on 'space' and 'place' in relation to film and television has emerged as a particular subfield of enquiry in recent years. It appears – not uncoincidentally – to have been supported and mirrored by similar moves in the disciplines of sociology and cultural geography. Works such as Gillian Rose's *Feminism and Geography*, and parts of David Harvey's *Condition of Postmodernity*

- 1 Gillian Rose *Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1993) David Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1989)

- 2 See for example Margaret Morse *Virtualities* (Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press 1998) David Morley and Kevin Robins 'Spaces of identity' in *Screen* vol 30 no 4 (1989) pp 10–34 Anne Friedberg *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University Of California Press 1993) James Donald 'The city: the cinema modern spaces' in Chris Jenks (ed.) *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge 1995), Tom Gunning 'From the kaleidoscope to the X-ray: urban spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin and the *Traffic in Souls*' in *Wide Angle* vol 19 no 4 (1997) pp 25–61 and Giuliana Bruno *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press 1993)

(somewhat notoriously in Harvey's case, in reference to his implementation of Bruno's work on *Blade Runner*) have suggested possible creative links between the disciplines.<sup>1</sup> The work of Walter Benjamin and, in particular, the material relating to the Arcades project and his work on Baudelaire have also suggested ways in which space, place, the city and mobility as structuring metaphors can underpin new readings and understandings of different film texts and television as a medium. In relation to television, Margaret Morse's, David Morley's and Kevin Robins's work stands out, and in film, work by Anne Friedberg, James Donald, Tom Gunning and Giuliana Bruno is also significant.<sup>2</sup>

What I thought it might be useful to do, in this 'conversation', would be to identify and evaluate some of the outcomes of this sub-field. It seems to me that there are two distinct ways in which the concepts of space/place have been used as a way of addressing issues of representation; and as a way of conceptualizing experience. Firstly, representation: an expanding body of literature (to which the three articles in this issue of *Screen* loosely adhere) uses historical and critical material related to the 'city' and discusses the way in which certain films have represented the modern or postmodern city. Furthermore, in relation to early cinema, for example, such work has also attempted to understand the representation of the city by cinema as a fundamental part of the construction of actual cities themselves, and the lived experience of individuals who inhabit these particular places. The 'city', or the characteristics of city life, then becomes a way of interpreting identity and living practices within the modern and/or postmodern world.

**DM:** Let me just make a brief comment here, because we have already made a leap, and one which I think is very interesting. You begin by talking about 'space' and 'place' but, only a few paragraphs into our discussion, we have already specified this as 'the city'. Now, in our case of course, we have every excuse – the concern of this issue of *Screen* is to weave around the three terms space/film/city. But I think it is worth reflecting on this as an elision which is commonly made, and with far less excuse.

Of course, as you have intimated, there is a deep historical connection between the development of cinema and a particular form and type of urbanization. That last bit is important: there were cities way before cinema, and cinema developed in particular cities. And they inevitably reflected that particularity. There is, in other words, a historical geography of this intimate connection which we should always recognize, for reasons both of politics and better analysis. I start feeling itchy when arguments about the relation city/cinema evoke such generalizations – apparently ahistorical and non-geographical – as 'the city' and 'the urban sensibility'.

But, nonetheless, there has indeed been an intricate and, as you say, two-way relationship between the emergence of cinema and

3 Siegfried Kracauer *The Mass Ornament* ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)

4 Giuliana Bruno 'Site seeing architecture and the moving image' in *Wide Angle* vol. 19 no. 4 (1997)

certain aspects of urban development. Whether in classics such as Kracauer, or in more recent writings such as those of Bruno and Donald, the case has been strongly made.<sup>3</sup> So let me pause and reflect on it for a moment. To begin with, what is the relationship between spatiality and the city? My own position is that cities (of the kind which we have in mind here) are indeed particular forms of spatiality, but that particularity consists primarily in an intensification, a dramatic exaggeration, of characteristics which I would argue are intrinsic to 'space' more generally. Bruno, for instance, makes the connection between space and nineteenth-century western cities through the trope of 'mobility'. film as a form of *flânerie*; those cities as places of mobility where 'locations' were increasingly locations of transit.<sup>4</sup> It is an interesting connection (though one which runs the risk of being taken too far). But it is not just city spaces which were 'of transit' or even transitory. Empirically, one might (perhaps should) point to that other set of mobilities – the massive mobilities of imperialism and colonialism – which were underway – beyond, way beyond, the little worlds of *flânerie* – at the same period of history. Other 'spaces' too were mobile. And philosophically I would argue anyway for a conceptualization of space which incorporated precisely this principle: no spaces are stable, given for all time; all spaces are transitory and one of the most crucial things about spatiality (a characteristic which lends both its continual openness and, thus, its availability to politics) is that it is always being made. The mobility of those cities is a hyperversion of spatiality in general. Certainly it was a mobility which was *recognized* more in cities than elsewhere, but let us be careful not to essentialize what was a genuine and deep, but historically and geographically grounded, connection into a narrative which separates 'cities' off within what, I believe, is an immensely rich field of enquiry: that of the relation between film and spatiality in general.

There is another aspect to this story of the connection between cities and film. Quite often the connection is established through reference to the intensity of cities (agreed) and to the way in which in them the discordant, the different, the supposedly incongruous, hit up against each other. This is indeed a characteristic of (probably most) major metropolises: they bring together in a new spatial configuration, and a dense and intense one at that, a vast variety of different human trajectories (and not only human, of course, but let us retain this one simplifying assumption). But yet again I would argue that while this is indeed a *fortiori* characteristic of cities, it is also a defining characteristic of the spatial more generally. For me, space is (among other things) the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity/difference. On the one hand, if we really agree that space is *the product of* spatial relations (not just an arena within which social relations take place) – and we all ritually cite

Lefebvre to this effect – then for there to be relations there must be coexisting multiplicity.<sup>5</sup> And on the other hand, for there to be multiplicity there must be space. Space is precisely the sphere of the possibility of coming across difference. The grand modernist narratives so often ruled that out: everyone was envisaged as part of the same history, and difference was reorganized into historical queue, spatial difference obliterated into temporal sequence. So again, I would argue, cities are an intense form of (certain aspects of) spatiality in general.

Now, the reason for elaborating this aspect of the argument is, again, a political one. Film is fantastic at portraying this aspect of intense and unexpected juxtaposition, which is a characteristic of space, and of cities in particular. But ‘space’ (spatial configuration) also has other aspects. There is, for instance, connectivity and influence which spans the globe. We live today in a world in which, on the one hand, we are increasingly crowded into cities and, on the other hand, we live in invisible contact with, and effect upon, people and things on the other side of the planet. Precisely because of its mobility, its ability to travel, to make new juxtapositions, new cartographies (as Bruno puts it), film has the potential powerfully to present this other aspect of our spatial world as well.

**KL:** Yes, I think there are two things here. Firstly, how space ‘works’ rather than ‘is’. This ‘production’ is something that film can attempt to represent, although not always as successfully as might at first appear. For example, even in films that are about ‘spatiality’ such as *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1993), which is very obviously about the intense and complex spatial relations of Los Angeles in the 1990s, spatiality is subsumed within a temporal chronology of plot. The ‘all-at-once-ness’ (the space and time dynamic) of a spatial understanding, the multiplicity which I think you are suggesting is inherent to space, is reduced by the film to a computer-game-like mobility which simply follows the protagonist, D-Fens (Michael Douglas), as he makes his way across the city.

Yet the way in which film and cinema work spatially is not only in relation to the film as text with a beginning, middle and end, but how the film and the cinema – the images, the screen, the building and the audience – are situated. The response of different audiences to a film like *Falling Down* or to films in general, whether they are seen in pornographic cinemas, art houses, multiplexes or village halls, makes the *experience* of any film part of this multiplicity. Films that celebrate cinema often describe this aspect, and demonstrate how film and the experience of cinema have been used as a refuge, as contrast, as education or seduction.

Space and place are therefore useful as a way of understanding how film makes social relationships visible, or how they are articulated through the visual and aural capabilities of film and television. Socially determining factors such as gender, race and class

are seen to be revealed, constructed and contested in the way in which films and programmes construct space and place. There is an attempt here to relate the construction of the diegesis (the 'world') of the film (emphasizing the use of framing, the use of landscape, architecture and mise-en-scene, the placing of characters within particular geographical locations) with the lived world of actual social relations.

**DM:** Perhaps, though, we don't have to separate the two aspects so sharply. Precisely what I was getting at earlier was how the very construction of films could help either to criticise or to reorder the geographical imaginations we have of the world. 'Social relationships' don't only exist in intimate spatialities, or in face-to-face encounters, or even within cities. They also structure our imaginations of the planet.

However, what we have already agreed on, it seems, is that the potential for creative dialogue between people in film studies and those in geography is enormous. It has already been productive, and I think could be more so. A concern with mutual construction of spatiality and social relations (and identities) is clearly something which we share.

Indeed there is an issue here, which it might be fruitful for us both to take up. Film is a form of representation. One of its characteristics as a form of representation is its ability to present (spatial) mobility. Yet there is also a long tradition of understanding representation, in all its forms, as a way of fixing, of pinning things down. To present, in that sense, is to capture, to immobilize. Moreover, there is also a long tradition of characterizing representation as spatial. 'To represent is to spatialize' is a common understanding which runs through structuralism, through the work of many poststructuralists (such as Laclau) and through theorists often quoted by film theorists (such as de Certeau).<sup>6</sup> David Harvey repeats this nostrum when he writes: 'Any system of representation, in fact, is a spatialization of sorts which automatically freezes the flow of experience and in so doing distorts what it strives to represent'.<sup>7</sup>

I have two immediate questions or points here. My question for film theory is: *does* representation necessarily 'freeze the flow of experience'? (I don't think 'freeze' here should just mean 'stop' – though Harvey clearly reads it in that way. Rather, it might be taken to mean 'fix', in the sense of providing one reading.) The point is usually made in relation to the written word and photography and often gets tortured when it comes to film.

**KL:** Traditionally, film studies has often been concerned to 'determine' meaning, and as such has been in the business of apparently fixing meaning in the way you describe here. Yet this is a superficial understanding: firstly, films, even in the 'canon' of film studies, are not read or interpreted once and for ever, as if there could be a perfect understanding. Films are viewed, felt and

<sup>6</sup> Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity* p. 206.

interpreted again and again in different circumstances and for different reasons. The process of interpretation is not closed down by analysis, but opened up. Secondly, the analysis of film is not solely concerned with the visual image. The best film analysis is always conscious of the temporal qualities of film – significantly, this means that it is always about space *and* time. Mobility, passage, memory, consequences and potential can be presented and articulated by film through editing, flashbacks, flashforwards, dissolves, sound effects, voiceover and music. Because it is a temporal medium, film can address spatiality in a way that other visual media can only allude to.

Television studies, because of its focus on the audience and on the social aspects of viewing, is already about exploring the potential openness of different programmes and the potential multiplicity of meanings that might be ascribed to any one text. Notoriously, this has sometimes led to a crisis of indeterminacy, where every reading becomes equally valid or equally contested. Embedded into the temporal and spatial routines of everyday life, television presents itself as open, unfixed, multiple. However, television is, of course, a medium that is determined by different commercial and public interests, and its ideological function is often to try and erase or obscure real multiplicity and difference. Through its manipulation of space and time – in its linearity, repetition, circularity and implementation of a largely spurious authority – television often closes down or fixes social relationships in ways that work against the more progressive aspects of its inherent spatial characteristics.

**DM** While I am in accord with all those points I'm not sure that they really address the crux of my concern with this issue of the definition of representation as fixing. Of course, all representations can subsequently be interpreted, and indeed variously interpreted. But what about that view of representation as necessarily 'spatializing', which in turn is taken to mean that it 'automatically freezes'? This is an issue which I find really difficult.

But I spoke before of a division of labour on this question of representation/fixity/spatialization, and the foregoing was my question to you, as a film theorist. My question to myself (or to other geographers worrying away at the same issues) is how to disturb that underlying assumption that to spatialize is to render static. I absolutely do not agree with this. It is to understand space not only as the opposite of time but as the absence of time. For me, the aim must be the opposite, to try to imagine always in terms of the *integration* of space and time. There is only space/time–time/space. As I said earlier, spatiality is always in the process of being made.

**KL:** Perhaps another way into this question would be to return to the trope of mobility introduced here by your reference to Bruno's work. In a related but distinct approach, work on television discourse which concentrates on its manipulation of time and space has demonstrated the way in which television virtually mobilizes its



audience as it moves between different programmes and forms of representation. In work on actual audiences themselves, the recognition of the way in which media flows determine access to different programmes, as well as the impact of time-space distanciation (and/or compression), have become important aspects of understanding how audiences make sense of programmes. More recent work has emphasized how the very localized practices of place (in communities, in living rooms) must also be incorporated into this 'thick description' of the experience and meaningfulness of television.

My own experience has been related to my research into television aesthetics and in teaching courses employing these different approaches to both film and television. In terms of my research, the theoretical deconstruction and evaluation of the practice and experience of space and place allowed me to begin to justify how television has become part of lived experience, rather than simply a representation of the world experienced 'out there'. This is true, of course, for film too – at least in part – but it seemed to me much more pertinent to the characteristics of television as a text and its nature as a technological and industrial form. This was best exemplified for me by your observations suggesting that place should not be understood as bounded, or concrete, but rather as a 'network of social relations'. In particular, your vivid description of a walk down Kilburn High Road suggested to me that the experience of watching television (as an always-unfinished process) mirrors the experience of this pedestrian.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly the way in which you demonstrate how particular local relationships are integrated with greater or wider relations of power and forms of representation are negotiations that any habitual television viewer will be familiar with. In film, the terminus or 'the end' of the film's narrative, the fact that the diegesis of the film is, in some senses, already completed – bound – suggests to me that film offers a very different kind of experience. For me, personally, this realization offered a way in which I could begin to think about television aesthetics as different from, and no longer confined to, a model originating from, and organized within, film studies. A theoretically informed understanding of the dynamics of space and place, then, is very useful in understanding how television functions within the domestic sphere, nationally and globally, in a way that is not only about representation, but also about experience – mundane as well as fantastic experience, as you demonstrate in your example.

For example, a dominant textual characteristic of television is the concept of 'flow'. This quality of television – its ongoing-ness, its repetition and circularity – while implied by the technological potential of the medium (to be a ceaseless transmission) is not, of course, really or solely determined by the fact that television is 'electronic broadcasting'. Instead 'flow' has emerged as a

<sup>8</sup> See also David Morley 'Where the global meets the local: notes from the sitting room' in *Television: Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp. 270–90.

distinguishing feature of the medium from within a particular historical and social context – as a response to and a feature within modern life. As it relates both to the structure of many of the programmes on television as well as the overarching discourse of television itself, this electronic flow mimics or reproduces a ‘space of flow’ that Manuel Castells argues has become the new ‘geography’ of the contemporary world.<sup>9</sup> Crucially, however, this flow makes sense only in relation to the coming and going, the attention and interruptions, present in domestic routines. Television’s flow, therefore, becomes meaningful only in the way that it interacts with what Rick Altman once characterized as ‘household flow’.<sup>10</sup> An informed understanding of space and place, then, ought to be a central part of understanding how the ‘inside-out and outside-in’ experience of television actually structures understanding and lived experience

**DM:** Listening to you, and also reading some of David Morley’s work, enables me to capture a way of integrating (and, as you say, disturbing the boundaries between) the spatialities of those things which are so frequently held apart (although we also say they shouldn’t be, and television clearly transgresses the boundary) ‘reality’ and ‘representation’. In the article in which I walk down Kilburn High Road I also try to illustrate the very different ways in which distinct groups of people are linked into ‘global relations’. Among the figures which I conjure is ‘The pensioner in a bedsit in any inner city in this country, eating British working-class-style fish and chips from a Chinese take-away, watching a US film on a Japanese television, and not daring to go out after dark. And anyway the public transport’s been cut’.<sup>11</sup> To add into this the intricacies of the household flows and to bring them into them the manner of engagement with that television, as you describe, would both enrich and specify (in the sense that household flows and their relation to television must vary) the picture of spatial relations, and thus the (active) manner of incorporation of this ‘pensioner’ into the power-geometries of time–space compression. If television can really change our way of thinking about space/places, so that they are conceived as open and interrelated, that would be an achievement. After the recognition of openness and interrelatedness must come recognition of the nature of power relations which do indeed bind places together.

**KL:** Certainly, as I have already indicated, the ‘flow’ of television – whether in relation to the schedule of television programmes, or in the passage of television flows across borders – is far from being ideologically neutral. The problem for television studies, however, is the separation between work done on this latter aspect – in broadcasting policy and media regulation – and work concentrating on textual analysis. There is interesting work being done: Roger Silverstone, John T. Caldwell, Kevin Robins and Margaret Morse all

9 See for example Manuel Castells *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996)

10 Rick Altman ‘Television sound in Horace Newcomb (ed.) *Television: the Critical View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

11 Doreen Massey ‘A global sense of place’ in *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) pp. 149–50

12 See for example Roger Silverstone *Television and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge 1994) John T. Caldwell *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* (Princeton, NJ: Rutgers University Press 1995) Kevin Robins *Into the Image* (London: Routledge 1996)

demonstrate sensitivity both to the open process of interpretation and to the overarching *situated* nature of programmes and audiences<sup>12</sup>

Most obviously, it has become very clear in recent (and ongoing) conflicts within Europe and elsewhere, that the availability of personnel and technology, along with access, expertise and the means for distribution, determines how and when television can reveal difference and multiplicity. This, then, has consequences for what television can do or say for people, whether they are actively involved in the conflict or not.

Generally, I have found that students in film and television have been excited and inspired by the implementation of space and place. Unsurprisingly, though, they often replicate some of the difficulties and limitations that arise in this process of cross-fertilization. Work they produce on specific film texts – whether this is, for example, *Falling Down*, *Wings of Desire* (Wim Wenders, 1987) or films such as *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988) and *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) – are sometimes little more than re-descriptions, where crudely drawn ‘maps’ of the social world are shown to fit the topography of the film in question. Although it can lead to vivid and surprising revelations, I am conscious that it can sometimes result in a celebration, rather than an interrogation, of the film as a constructed entity.

In relation to television, the process of ‘thick description’ that the acknowledgement of the importance and specifics of space and place demands, can become so particular, so finely grained, that it becomes limited or impossible as an interpretive framework. Even if it is achieved, it is difficult for the author to draw out any firm conclusions or generalizations.

**DM:** Absolutely. And if it becomes too formulaic, space can seem static, like a set of codes through which things can be simply interpreted. Yet, to get full benefit from incorporating space into an analysis, it must be integrated with temporality, and must recognize what I think of as its essential element of chaos (or Gillian Rose’s paradoxicality). It is through taking on board these complexities, inconsistencies and contradictions of spatiality that taking space seriously might really make a difference.

**KL:** Yes, at the core there is, I think, a shared critical motivation to reveal how ideology and politics function, and how, more particularly, they are naturalized. Naturalized by environments that surround us, absorb us, or direct us in the business of our everyday and fantasy lives.

*This conversation demonstrates, in a small way, that there is much to be gained from sharing perspectives and understandings of how both fictional and real spaces are shaped and organized. What Doreen and I have introduced here is continued in different ways in*

*the three articles which follow. What we would hope, however, is that the potential space of interaction between geography and film is revealed as still very much open to further exploration. James Donald's concluding remarks, inspired in part by his attendance at a recent conference in Dublin, demonstrate how this interaction has already begun to mature*

# Revisiting the belly of Naples: the body and the city in the films of Mario Martone

ÁINE O'HEALY

Mario Martone is the most prominent member of the new generation of Neapolitan directors who have recently restored Naples to the forefront of Italian filmmaking, a position it has not enjoyed since the heyday of the silent era. The work of Martone and his contemporaries Pappi Corsicato, Stefano Incerti, Antonio Capuano and Antonietta De Lillo is symptomatic of the revitalization of Neapolitan cultural life that has been gaining momentum since the early 1990s. So far, he has directed three features – *Morte di un matematico napoletano/Death of a Neapolitan Mathematician* (1992), *L'amore molesto/Wounded Love* (1995), *Teatro di guerra/Rehearsals for War* (1998) – and several short films, including the final episode of *I Vesuviani/The Vesuvians* (1997), a compilation film made by five members of the so-called Neapolitan school.

All three of Martone's feature films were shot on location in Naples. Although he collaborated on the script for the first of these with the Neapolitan writer Fabrizia Ramondino, he wrote the two subsequent features on his own. As cinematic constructions of this frequently filmed, painted and photographed city, his films stand out for a number of reasons, but most immediately for their skilful deployment of the distinctive visual and aural details of his locations – the neighbourhoods and interiors, the dialect and street sounds of an urban environment that seems both familiar and strange, contemporary and archaic. Working mainly with a small group of

Neapolitan actors with roots in professional theatre, he draws on their familiarity with local dialect and gestural language while avoiding the staginess that has come to signify 'Neapolitan' in the mainstream media. Ultimately, in Martone's films the city does not function simply as a point of visual reference, but becomes a dynamic part of the narrative development. Avoiding conventional realism, his work evokes a complex psychogeography of Naples,<sup>1</sup> problematizing the configuration of the city in the previous tradition of Italian cinema.

When Martone co-founded the theatre company Falso Movimento in Naples in the late 1970s, his intention was to move beyond his Neapolitan roots rather than to explore them. He claims that he and his colleagues, who shared an interest in avant-garde theatre, wanted to distance themselves from the stereotypes of the Neapolitan tradition through the creation of an alternative, internationally oriented cultural space.<sup>2</sup> The desire to reject the clichés of *napoletanità* – the popular, internationally disseminated construction of Naples and its people best exemplified by the plays of Eduardo De Filippo and the Neapolitan films of Vittorio De Sica – is comprehensible in a contemporary, left-leaning artist and intellectual of Neapolitan origin. As residents of the principal metropolis of southern Italy – historically the poorest, most backward part of the nation – Neapolitan intellectuals who choose to work in the city often have an uneasy relationship with perceptions of Naples disseminated by mainstream Italian culture. Moreover, at the time when Martone was developing his work in theatre in the 1980s, Naples was in the throes of one of the most depressing periods of its recent history, with its infrastructure in shambles as the result of long-term political corruption and organized crime.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the dilapidation of the urban space, the landscape of Naples has been renowned for its beauty throughout history. The city's cosmopolitan character was shaped by a complicated history involving successively the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Normans, Spanish, French and Austrians, before Naples finally became part of the new Italian state following national unification in the nineteenth century. All of these diverse peoples left their mark on the city and surrounding area. Known in more recent times for the vitality of its street life, the Baroque splendour of its architecture, and the dilapidation of the crowded neighbourhoods that form the city's ancient core, it lends itself to mystification and stereotyping, serving both to idealize and vilify the southern metropolis in the national imaginary. Foreign visitors have recorded powerful impressions of the city since early modern times. One of their most insistent tropes is that of the ruin. For Goethe, the ruined landscapes of Naples represented an instance of the romantic sublime. Alfred Sohn-Rethel describes the city as a place of catastrophe, a kind of perennial dystopia, owing in part to its proximity to Vesuvius.<sup>4</sup> Similarly,

1 I borrow the term psychogeography from Iain Chambers, who in turn extrapolated this concept from the Situationists. Arguing against the necessity of reading Naples as the sign of a unique, rational firm referent, Chambers invokes the model of psychogeography in his description of the city's capacity for dispersal, thus escaping predictable categorizations. See *Migrancy: Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 106.

2 Mario Martone, *Teatro di guerra: un diario* (Rome: Bompiani, 1998), p. 267.

3 Ibid., p. 263.

4 Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *La filosofia del rotto* (Naples: Alessandra Carola, 1991), p. 21.

- 5 Gustaw Herling *Volcano and Miracle* (New York: Penguin 1996) p. 2
- 6 Chambers *Migrancy Culture Identity* p. 107
- 7 Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis 'Naples' in Benjamin *One Way Street and Other Writings* trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books 1979) pp. 167–76
- 8 *Ibid.* p. 174
- 9 Graeme Gilloch *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1996) p. 28
- 10 Giuliana Bruno 'City views: the voyage of film images' in David B. Clarke (ed.) *The Cinematic City* (London and New York: Routledge 1997) pp. 47–8
- 11 Neapolitan filmmakers of the silent era were renowned for their realistic deployment of scenes from everyday life in the city coupled with a flair for melodramatic narratives. This was in sharp contrast to the epic or colossal style for which Roman filmmaking from this period is best known. For a discussion of Neapolitan cinema during the silent era see Giuliana Bruno's book on the pioneering work of filmmaker Elvira Notari: *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1993)
- 12 Cited in Mirco Melano 'Italian cinema since 1945' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* vol. 15 no. 3 (1995) p. 388

Gustaw Herling invokes the heightened awareness or sense of drama engendered by the ever-present volcano.<sup>5</sup> Describing the city as 'both old and new, provincial yet global, managed yet out of control', Iain Chambers claims that Naples has become emblematic of the city in crisis, of the city *as crisis*.<sup>6</sup>

Walter Benjamin, who lived briefly on nearby Capri in 1924, extrapolated the concept of porosity from Goethe's image of the ruin. Benjamin's experience of Naples – articulated in the short essay he wrote with Asja Lacis – was pivotal to the development of his thought, since it provided the starting point for his ongoing study of the modern city.<sup>7</sup> With the term 'porosity' he sought to encapsulate his perception of the social, spatial and temporal organization characteristic to Naples. Porosity suggests indeterminacy and interpenetration. In reference to Naples it evokes the overlapping of the old and the new, the merging of nature and culture, of private and public, of the manifest and the hidden. For Benjamin the Neapolitan continuity between public and private space was reminiscent of collective life in the African *kraal*.<sup>8</sup> Like the city's architecture, social life and family life in Naples were, he claimed, fluidly defined and loosely organized. Graeme Gilloch has noted that Benjamin's notion of the interpenetrability of interior and exterior space and the image of the ruin combine to suggest a fracturing of the superficial appearance of things and the possibility of discovering what is normally concealed.<sup>9</sup> This understanding of porosity as a model of access to knowledge, wherein indeterminacy and ambivalence have the capacity to reveal rather than to conceal, provides a useful guide to understanding Martone's cinematic constructions of his native city, particularly in his most accomplished film *L'amore molesto*.

In approaching the representation of his native city, Martone was aware that he inherited not only the baggage of a long literary and pictorial tradition, but also a daunting legacy of accumulated cinematic images. As Giuliana Bruno has pointed out, Naples suffers from a problem of overrepresentation, running the risk of becoming fossilized in its folkloric and picturesque aspects as both a frozen and a serial image.<sup>10</sup> Filmed repeatedly since the beginning of cinema, it is, after Rome, the Italian city most often seen on screen. In the early decades of the century Naples was a vibrant centre of film production, quite distinct from the kind of filmmaking practised in Rome during the same period.<sup>11</sup> In subsequent years the cinematic representations of Naples offered by natives and non-natives alike built up a repertoire of images that helped to consolidate broad myths of the city and its people.

Vittorio De Sica described Naples, his birthplace, as the 'most photogenic, the most human city in Italy and in the world'.<sup>12</sup> This unapologetically sentimental perspective can be discerned in his five-part episodic film *Gold of Naples* (1953), which also pays tribute, in

**13** This perception prompted him to set his *Decameron* (1971) in Naples and surrounding areas (rather than in Boccaccio's Florence). See Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Pasolini commenta il suo film tratto dal *Decameron*', *L'Espresso* (December 1970) p. 47. Pasolini expressed his view of Naples in a variety of contexts but particularly in a series of letters addressed to a fictional Neapolitan youth, Gennariello, which appeared as a regular column in *Corriere della sera* in 1975 and was later republished in *Lutheran Letters* trans. Stuart Hood (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1983) pp. 17–48.

a comedic vein, to the stereotype of Neapolitan cunning and quick-witted adaptability. Roberto Rossellini, by contrast, came to Naples from Rome, and in *Voyage in Italy* (1953) imagined the city and its hinterland as the repository of a powerful, primitive spirituality that had been lost elsewhere. Similarly, Pier Paolo Pasolini perceived in the southern metropolis traces of a premodern sensibility that had resisted contamination by contemporary capitalist culture.<sup>13</sup>

In the history of cinematic representations of Naples there is a contrasting trend towards realism which, while remaining broadly sympathetic to Neapolitans, focuses on the severe social problems that have afflicted the city since the 1940s. A number of postwar films, including the Neapolitan episode in Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946), seem to suggest that black-market trading or petty theft had become by the end of the war a necessary survival strategy for the impoverished population of southern Italy. Lihana Cavani's *La pelle* (1981) – an adaptation of Curzio Malaparte's autobiographical account of Allied-occupied Naples – offers, however, a much harsher perspective on the degradation of the city during the same period. Other films such as Francesco Rosi's *La sfida/The Challenge* (1958) and *Le mani sulla città/Hands over the City* (1963), motivated by a leftist/humanist position, take a severely critical view of the corruption and violence that became endemic in Naples in subsequent years. Among comic representations of the city and its hinterland, the most controversial constructions are found in the films of Lina Wertmüller, whose critique of local culture in *Pasqualino Settebellezze/Seven Beauties* (1975) and *O speriamo che me la cavo/Ciao Professore* (1992) is articulated as grotesque comedy.

Interviews with Martone reveal that he was determined from the beginning to distance himself from ready-made perspectives of Naples, that is, from the tendency to mystify or sentimentalize the Neapolitans, as well as from the discourse of abjection in which mainstream allusions to the city are frequently couched. In discussing his work I will argue, however, that his complex films are neither entirely free from the sense of abjection, nor immune to some of the myths generated by those who have viewed Naples from the outside.

Throughout the 1980s Martone's energies were dedicated almost exclusively to his work in theatre. In 1984, however, he made a twenty-minute documentary film for television, *Nella città barocca/In the Baroque City*. As its title suggests, the film focuses on the monuments, sculptures and buildings constructed during the heyday of the Kingdom of Naples, and excludes the rest of the city. Martone later attributed to this project his discovery that in terms of visual style Naples is composed of several cities that may be unpacked from inside each other like a series of Chinese boxes. As he was about to embark on his first film project in the early 1990s, he began to rethink his relationship with Neapolitan culture. His comments on



the city suggest a desire to carry out a process of discursive recuperation:

Naples is composed of two cities. The first consists of the elements that have survived of the ancient city, still retraceable in the faces, language and behaviour of the part of the population that has managed to resist modernization. The other aspect of Naples is composed of what has grown up around the old city like a parasite on a plant: the contemporary city, rife with real estate speculation, petit bourgeois competitiveness, and a tradition of corruption based on the collusion of political power and organized crime. These two cities are not isolated from each other, the contemporary city distorts many aspects of the older part, it vampirizes, feeds off it, transforming it into a phantasm.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Martone, *Teatro di guerra*  
p. 263

Martone's aim became the stripping away of this phantasm. He speaks of his project as a civic duty, undertaken through the exercise of artistic imagination. Yet implicit in this declaration is a hint of nostalgia for a lost authenticity, an original purity disfigured by modernity. Privileging the older city as the repository of authentic value, his words resonate to some degree with the idealized view of Naples articulated by Pasolini several years earlier. Thus it is hardly surprising to observe a quotation from Pasolini, praising the Neapolitans' resistance to modernity, inserted after the credits of Martone's short film *Rasoi* (1993).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> With his characteristic idealization of the archaic and the primitive, Pasolini compared Neapolitans to communities in contemporary Africa that refused to adapt to the so-called civilized world. The people of Naples are like the great tribes of people such as the Tuareg or the Boia who have allowed themselves to die out, resisting the new system of power. Georgette Ranucci and Stefanelle Unghe (eds), *Mario Martone* (Rome: Script/Leuto 1995) p. 49.

In a series of lively and sometimes surreal monologues spoken by a handful of characters (including a street urchin, a prostitute, a talking statue of the Virgin Mary, and a king and queen of Naples), *Rasoi* celebrates the wit, fantasy and linguistic tradition of the Neapolitans, who have cultivated a distinctive local culture that is at once humorous and melancholy. Just under an hour in length, this is the filmed version of a stage show that was written in dialect by Enzo Moscato and performed under Martone's direction by his theatre company Teatri Uniti. Throughout the performance the actors remain on the proscenium, standing or sitting against the backdrop of a red curtain. In a series of fluid tracking shots the camera moves among the actors, while they remain positioned in a tableau-like figures in a Neapolitan nativity scene. Without leaving the theatre, *Rasoi* evokes the sights and sounds of Naples through the physiognomy, fantasy, gestures and speech of its characters.

Despite Martone's declared desire to strip away the elements that have obscured the supposedly 'authentic' core of Naples, *Rasoi* seems intent on creating its own phantasms through a process of aesthetic distancing. This stylized celebration of the Neapolitan tradition evokes an element of the museum display in the static beauty of the actors' bodies, the chromatic intensity of costumes and backdrop, and the claustrophobic quality of the theatrical space.

Martone's construction of Naples in his feature films, where the

body of the city is visually deployed in location shooting, stands in sharp contrast to *Rasoi*, and reveals an openness to ambiguity and ambivalence which, while privileging the dynamic interaction of actors and cityscape, avoids both the realism of social witness (as found in the films of Rosi, for example) and the stereotypes of *napoletanità*. None of the three feature films, however, is entirely devoid of strategies of aesthetic distancing, prompted in each case by specific narrative circumstances. *Morte di un matematico napoletano* is set exclusively in 1959, while *L'amore molesto* is set in the 1990s, with extensive flashbacks to the 1950s or 1960s. Both films allow Martone the opportunity to develop a stylized recreation of Naples in the 1950s (a period that he does not personally remember, since he was born in 1959). His third feature, *Teatro di guerra*, set in 1993, shifts back and forth between the diegetic world of the Greek tragedy *Seven Against Thebes* and the contemporary setting inhabited by the actors who are rehearsing this play. In addition to its theatrical aspects, it mixes conventions from both the documentary and fiction film, thus presenting a hybrid quality unique in Martone's repertoire to date.

Although it was set in the 1950s, *Morte di un matematico napoletano* was shot on location without difficulty in 1992. By selecting buildings, neighbourhoods and panoramas that had remained virtually unchanged over the previous forty years, Martone was able to complete the production without reconstructing his locations. Unfolding in a variety of settings that constituted the social life of Naples during that period, the film provides a fictionalized account of the days immediately preceding the suicide of the well-known intellectual and political radical Renato Caccioppoli.

The film constructs Renato (only Caccioppoli's first name is used throughout the film) as a *straniero in patria*, a Neapolitan native



Carlo Cecchi in *Morte di un matematico napoletano* (Mario Martone, 1992).

deeply alienated in his own city. The tension between intimacy and estrangement, participation and rejection, that constitutes his protagonist's experience of Naples, enabled Martone to explore the city in challenging and ambivalent ways. In several scenes Renato roams restlessly through the labyrinthine streets of the city's historical centre. An experienced theatre actor, Carlo Cecchi conveys without melodrama the physical malaise and emotional alienation of the alcoholic Renato, whose suicidal intentions are unsuspected by those around him. The camera follows the protagonist's unkempt figure as he moves through a variety of social settings and situations. Always wearing a crumpled raincoat, he seems an incongruous presence in most locations, whether the university auditorium, the local headquarters of the Communist party, the Opera House, or the nocturnal haunt of gay men in one of the poorest parts of the city. His relationship with these environments is conveyed through his sometimes cordial, sometimes dismissive interactions with those he meets along the way, as he breaks unwritten rules and transgresses social boundaries. On the literal level Renato constitutes a figure of abjection, and his hurried movements back and forth through the city soon begin to suggest the frenetic gestures of a trapped animal. Simultaneously, however, the film accords to this shabby ruin of a man an air of tragic dignity.

Though the film does not shy away from the details of the protagonist's alcoholism and the squalour of his living conditions, the stylization of the Neapolitan locations through framing and lighting effects subverts the realism of these narrative details. *Morte di un matematico napoletano* is shot predominantly in warm shades of yellow and brown, evoking the sepia tones of a family album and inadvertently creating a sense of nostalgia for the period that forms the backdrop to the story. The film takes on a different mood in the funeral scene that functions as a sustained epilogue to the narrative of Renato's final days. Here, a hand-held camera moves restlessly among those assembled in the cemetery for the burial, recording their ironic comments and self-interested perspectives on the events taking place. The almost carnivalesque expressionism of this long choral sequence stands in contrast to the more sober rhythm of the earlier part of the film.

Martone's subsequent features, *L'amore molesto* and *Teatro di guerra*, both anchored in the 1990s, suggest that even if modernity has largely bypassed Naples, postmodernity has by now arrived there with a vengeance. The contemporary city, which has retained some of its archaic features, is thus represented in its complexity and dissonance. Of the two films, *Teatro di guerra* deploys a more consistently realistic approach. Shot in 16mm and later blown up to 35mm, it has some of the visual qualities of the documentary. Its narrative creates the fiction that we are watching a small, independent theatre group prepare a production of Aeschylus's

16 *Seven Against Thebes* enacts the legend of the seven heroes who battled Eteocles for his refusal to share the Theban throne with his younger brother, after the exile of their father Oedipus. The film thus has thematic resonance with the struggle of the film-makers in post-war Naples, decades after the death of the father. Tito

fratricidal tragedy *Seven Against Thebes*, which is to be brought to war-torn Sarajevo and staged at the theatre of a Bosnian friend.<sup>16</sup> Just as the troupe is about to leave for Sarajevo, however, the director reveals that his Bosnian friend has been killed and that the trip must be cancelled. Martone's film weaves implicit parallels between present-day Naples, Sarajevo and the ancient city of Thebes.

The theatre where this fictional troupe rehearses is the Teatro Nuovo, a run-down building in the notorious Quartieri Spagnoli, one of the roughest areas of the city, and a space they manage to claim for their use only through an elaborate subterfuge. Their struggle to mount the production is in sharp contrast to the conditions enjoyed by the official municipal theatre, with its privileged accommodation and subsidies. Here the players are surrounded by crime on the streets – the trade of soft and hard drugs, petty larceny and gangland assassinations. One member of the troupe has a criminal record and another a history of drug addiction. The director of the theatre, Leo, is on friendly terms with the neighbourhood boss, from whom he buys hashish, until the man is murdered by a rival *camorrista*.

The players come from different social classes and live in a variety of neighbourhoods, and the film tracks their movements around the metropolitan area, offering glimpses of daily life in the contemporary city. Images of Naples in this film range from panoramic shots of the bustling postmodern metropolis rarely glimpsed in Italian cinema, to scenes in ethnic restaurants, concert halls, theatres and a variety of dwellings including the cramped interiors of the *bassi*, the windowless ground-floor apartments found in the city's poorest neighbourhoods. In a scene of striking documentary realism, one of the members of the theatre group visits his ageing father who is dying in a dismal hospital ward with windows that open out on to a concrete wall. Drugs are everywhere



Anna Bonaiuto and Marco Baliani in *Teatro di guerra* (Mario Martone, 1998).

in the city, peddled by North African youths and *camorristi* alike. The police provide harassment rather than protection for the troupe, and ultimately arrest some of the actors for carrying fake weapons that were intended as performance props. In the midst of this chaos, however, everyday life goes on. *Teatro di guerra* highlights the ordinariness of the actors' lives in Naples, despite difficulties and imminent danger, while suggesting a parallel ordinariness in the lives of their counterparts in Sarajevo, similarly caught in the crossfire of violence. Nonetheless, the film's sustained deployment of the fratricidal narrative of *Seven Against Thebes* as a metaphor for the violence in both cities, while implicitly invoking the historical origins of Naples as a Greek colony of the fourth century BC, lends to *Teatro di guerra* a level of abstraction that is absent in the director's other work.

*L'amore molesto* is to date Martone's most accomplished film and his most interesting articulation of the familial, social and gendered space of Naples. Based on the novel of the same title by Elena Ferrante, the film is set for the most part in contemporary Naples, with flashbacks associated with the protagonist's childhood in the 1950s or 1960s. Though not credited as a screenwriter, Ferrante was influential in the development of the film, and Martone has acknowledged that he repeatedly sought her input while writing the script. The film thus gives particular prominence to issues of female subjectivity and the interplay of space, gender and social life in the city.

On one level, *L'amore molesto* develops as a detective story that suggests a variation on the female Oedipal plot. Delia, the protagonist, is a woman approaching middle age who returns to Naples following the apparent suicide of her mother Amalia in order to investigate the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death. Although she establishes no clear explanation for the mother's drowning, her investigation soon changes focus. Prompted by her return to the locations of childhood, Delia begins to retrieve painful, half-forgotten memories, and to uncover the roots of her ambivalent relationship with her mother and with the city of her birth. In the process, she is obliged to re-live the memory of her sexual violation as a small girl by an elderly man, a family acquaintance, and to acknowledge that she projected onto the mother her own imagined guilt for this event. This aspect of the film suggests the genre of therapeutic narratives described as 'recovered memory', where recollections of childhood sexual experiences, hitherto repressed, are retrieved cathartically by the adult subject.

The film is, however, as much about Naples as it is about Delia's personal drama. The historical moment is clearly indicated as the period preceding the watershed mayoral elections of 1993. By setting Delia's visit to the city of her birth at this precise historical juncture, the filmmaker was able to highlight some of the conditions that

prevailed in Naples during a period of political uncertainty and transition, thus giving the film a dimension unexplored in the novel upon which it is based. In an early scene set in Bologna – the prologue to the main body of the narrative – Delia distractedly watches a television report on the upcoming elections in Naples. The most conspicuous candidate for mayor is Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of the dictator, whose familiar profile and bleached blonde hair briefly appear on screen as she makes an appearance in the city. Throughout Delia's subsequent visit to Naples, posters advertising the neo-fascist party Alleanza Nazionale and its leading candidate – a figure of patriarchal femininity par excellence – are repeatedly seen in the background, as is the crumbling urban mess so urgently needing change. The initial image of Alessandra Mussolini's profile on the television screen invoking the Duce's illusory promise of phallic plenitude thus haunts Martone's construction of the city throughout the narrative.

*L'amore molesto* was made several months after the left-leaning Antonio Bassolino had defeated Alessandra Mussolini, albeit by a narrow margin, and had begun to instigate important changes in the city's government. The film presents the city as a noisy, overcrowded, mismanaged metropolis. Its public transport system is fraught with problems. A scene set at a political lunch in a large new restaurant obliquely suggests the longtime collusion of city government with private commercial interests. In addition to a general sense of dilapidation in the city, there is evidence of recent construction completed without concession to the rules of urban planning. In this brutally mismanaged cityscape, the camera lingers on an apartment building that has been partly demolished to accommodate a new motorway access route, while the other part is left standing. Political corruption in the form of payoffs or kickbacks – the practice that provoked the national crisis in the early 1990s known as Tangentopoli – is thus implicitly suggested in the film's political subtext. Martone's decision to set the action of the film at the moment when the threat of an electoral victory by the Right was still a real possibility in Naples allowed him to underscore the political volatility that has characterized the city for most of its history.

Martone has acknowledged this film's intertextual resonances with Roberto Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* (1954). Both films are for the most part focalized through the perspective of a woman who arrives in Naples from elsewhere at a crucial point in her life, and whose encounter with the city and its inhabitants triggers an existential crisis. In *Voyage to Italy* Ingrid Bergman is cast as the unhappily married British visitor who experiences the city as alien, though deeply fascinating and exotic. Bergman's tall frame and northern looks immediately mark her as different, as more physically imposing than the much smaller Neapolitans who surround her.

Moreover, since she provides the focalizing presence in the film, the spectators are sutured into her point of view, and the Neapolitans, whose language she does not understand, are constructed as curious, foreign, and undeniably other.

In *L'amore molesto* the protagonist Delia, played by Anna Bonaiuto, is, by contrast, an alienated native of the city who is both drawn to and repelled by the people who surround her. When she first arrives in Naples from Bologna, Delia is dressed in tailored, androgynous clothing, which marks her as an independent woman and an outsider. Later in the course of her stay, however, she is obliged to negotiate her way through the streets dressed in a very different manner, and her experience of the city changes accordingly.

Though Delia obviously understands the dialect spoken by the people she encounters, and we hear her use the same dialect in flashbacks to her childhood, she speaks standard Italian throughout her return visit to Naples. This intimacy with, and distance from, the mother tongue is an important trope of the film, and echoes Delia's relationship both to her mother and Naples itself. From the outset the film establishes a link between the mother and the city, a link of abjection. The ancient core of Naples, where several scenes in the film take place, is historically the site of poverty and crime but also of vibrant popular traditions. This general area is popularly referred to as *il ventre di Napoli*, the belly – or the womb – of Naples. The metaphorical association of parts of the city with parts of the body, and especially the lower body or the female body, is a discursive phenomenon with a lengthy history.<sup>17</sup> It is linked to the process in

17 See Steve Pile, *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 177 and Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 251.



Anna Bonaiuto in *L'amore molesto* (Mario Martone, 1995).

the constitution of subjectivity where the self is oriented around binary axes of high and low, self and other, thus instituting maps of meaning, power and identity.

Julia Kristeva has elaborated the concept of abjection to describe the function of power and disgust within this process, particularly in relation to the subject's differentiation from the mother.<sup>18</sup> In order to constitute itself, the subject needs to recognize, expel and disown what it is not. It needs, specifically, to demarcate its boundaries. A sense of revulsion with respect to bodily materials and feelings is established by the process of abjection. These elements are considered abject since they have an ambivalent status *vis-à-vis* the boundary between the self and what is considered other. Abjection thus involves perpetual surveillance, maintenance and a policy of impossible purity. According to Kristeva, the association of the mother with the abject is the source of all misogynistic effects of culture.

Mapping the abject occurs not only in relation to the body but also in relation to place. Recent work by cultural geographers has shown the emotional force that underlies the discursive construction of space in society, particularly in cities. Extrapolating from the work of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Steve Pile has argued, for example, that both the body and the city are intensifying grids for simultaneously social and psychic meanings, produced 'in the mobile, conflictual fusion of power, desire and disgust'.<sup>19</sup>

Several scenes in the film are shot in the gloomy, dilapidated interiors characteristic of the older, working-class neighbourhoods of Naples. In one such scene, a flashback to the recent past, Delia remembers taking an elevator with Amalia in the mother's apartment building. In response to Delia's spontaneous enquiry about the mother's sexual history, Amalia suddenly exposes her white, flabby abdomen, commenting sarcastically on the thought that a man might still be attracted to her body, and forces her horrified daughter to touch it. The scene has a provocative visual impact. Placed at a crucial juncture in the narrative – at the outset of Delia's return to Naples following her mother's death – it not only suggests the daughter's ambivalent relationship to the mother's body, but draws attention specifically to the abdomen, the belly of the mother, invoking by extension the metaphorical 'belly' of Naples as a site of abjection.

Though Delia's ageing mother enters the diegesis as a genteel, petit-bourgeois matron in an early sequence in the film depicting her visit to Bologna, minutes later she appears in a long shot as a bloated, naked corpse washed up on a beach near Naples. According to Kristeva, what is considered abject, dirty, polluted or debased may vary from culture to culture, but in all cultures the corpse is the utmost figure of abjection, since it confounds the boundary between human and non-human. A corpse is perceived neither as a person nor

<sup>18</sup> Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Pile *The Body and the City* p. 177.



a thing, but something in-between Amalia's corpse is additionally abject, however, since her aged, flabby body is discovered naked and exposed in a public place, thus transgressing rules that govern female nudity in private or public space.

In patriarchal societies women are implicitly constructed as abject. Marginalized peoples and communities are similarly positioned as abject in relation to the larger group. The south of Italy, including Naples, its largest city, is traditionally considered inferior to the north, and has long been feminized or abjected in the national imaginary.<sup>20</sup> This is a construction that southern Italians may either internalize or resist. When one perceives the 'other' simultaneously as oneself, the resulting conflict is intense. This tension can, however, be projected outward onto another. This process is enacted in *L'amore molesto*, where Delia transfers her own internalized disgust onto her mother, and by extension onto her native city.

In the film both the mother and the city of Naples are signifiers of excessive proximity, of an unpredictable and sometimes dangerous sensuality. In moving to the northern city of Bologna, Delia had distanced herself from the unruly place of her birth, and from her mother's invasive solicitude, expressed in the cadences of Neapolitan dialect that the adult daughter no longer speaks. For Delia, the mother is a figure of abjection, representing not only the slippery, ambivalent space between self and other, but also that between Woman and Mother. Delia fears being engulfed by her mother's identity, she fears fusion and loss of self. In the scene in the mother's apartment immediately following the funeral, she looks at her reflection in the mirror, and speaks to the dead woman: 'You are only a ghost', she says. 'I do not resemble you.' Even as she speaks, however, Delia begins to play with the possibility of that resemblance; first by applying the mother's makeup, later by wearing her clothes, and finally, in the film's last scene, by whimsically assuming Amalia's name. Her tentative identification through masquerade with the absent mother becomes possible as she begins to re-experience the harshly patriarchal spirit of Neapolitan life. She thus makes her descent into the realm of repressed memory and desire.

That the mother might occupy a site other than the abject is already suggested in the earliest flashback in the film. This sequence, which turns out to be a childhood memory or dream of the adult Delia, unfolds in a series of overexposed, almost monochromatic shots that evoke the everyday domestic life of Naples during the 1950s, reminiscent of De Sica's *Gold of Naples* and other films of the same period. The specificity of the Neapolitan location is reinforced by snatches of dialect heard on the soundtrack. The image of the mother as a beautiful young woman dominates this sequence. She is first seen nursing a baby at her breast, and later singing a Neapolitan folk song as she sits working at her sewing machine. In another part of the room the father is painting a landscape, smoking

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the discursive feminization of southern Italians see Vito Teti *La razza maledetta origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1993). Teti cites Alfredo Niceforo's view of the Neapolitans expressed in 1898: 'No other group of Italians is as light, fickle, and restless as the Neapolitans. Their lightness is truly feminine. Alongside the manly populations, such as the northern Italians, the Germans, and the English, the Neapolitans are a womanly people.' (p. 73).

as he works. The entire scene – focalized through the gaze of the child Delia – has an intensely stylized quality, and the washed-out quality of the image is punctuated by a vivid blue tint superimposed on privileged elements in the *mise-en-scène*, such as the mother's dress and the elaborate brocade material that she is sewing. This creates a slightly surreal effect, bestowing on the mother, as object of the daughter's intense gaze, an almost mythic dimension. Moreover, the costumes, props and hairstyles that so insistently evoke the cinema of the 1950s serve not to render the scene more realistic, but to create the impression of personal recollection enhanced by the interference of cinematic memory.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This interpretation is further supported by the fact that Delia whose remembered childhood unfolds against images of Naples in the 1950s would have reached the age of seven or eight – her apparent age in the flashbacks – during the 1960s not the 1950s

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud: *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920) in *On Metapsychology: the Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth Penguin Freud Library 1984) Volume 2 pp 283–6

This opening flashback is also rich in psychoanalytic allusion. As the mother smiles at the child Delia, and turns to resume her work at the sewing machine, a sudden breeze catches the curtain and blows it back and forth in front of her, alternately hiding and revealing her face to the daughter. The repeated loss and retrieval of the mother by the daughter's gaze is reminiscent of what Freud described as the *fort/da* game, a game invented by a small child to assuage its fears about separation from the mother through the demonstration of its own mastery.<sup>22</sup> Delia's visual memory of repeatedly losing and retrieving the mother suggests a similar anxiety and a fantasy of compensatory control. The element of control implied in this fantasy additionally reflects the dynamics of Delia's adult relationship with her mother and with the city of her birth at the outset of *L'amore molesto*, where she is in careful control of her limited contact with each. The film suggests, however, that in the course of her search for the 'truth' of the past, Delia must relinquish her fastidious avoidance of Naples and surrender to an identification with the mother that she had until now resisted.

The discomfort expressed by the adult Delia when confronted by the sight of the mother's abject belly is replicated in her discomfort as she moves about the city of Naples seeking clues to explain her mother's death by drowning. One of the most interesting sequences in the film occurs as Delia begins her investigation, and sets out for the boutique that provided the distinctive lingerie acquired by the mother shortly before her death and worn on the night of her drowning. First, in a long shot, we see Delia walk briskly through the public space of Naples, a sober, androgynous figure grounded against shop windows and a wall plastered with posters for the upcoming elections. As she boards a bus she is joined by her uncle, who intrusively insists on accompanying her to her destination. Delia's discomfort at this is intensified as she takes a seat in the overcrowded bus and gazes at the cramped mass of anonymous bodies that surround her. The uneasy intimacy of the scene is conveyed from Delia's point of view, and the sequence is dominated by closeups, corresponding to the fragmented view of the passengers' bodies available from her perspective on the crowded bus.

Whereas the uncle confidently and aggressively fights his way through the mass of bodies and insists on having a seat, Delia's experience of the public space is quite different, as she limits herself to observing those around her. Her gaze settles on a man standing nearby, who appears to take advantage of the cramped conditions in order to insinuate himself into suggestive proximity with an unsuspecting young woman. This triggers a memory from Delia's childhood, which is then invoked in a flashback. In this sequence, the child Delia accompanies her parents as they travel together on a crowded tram. A male passenger standing nearby spontaneously declares Delia a pretty child, and her mother acknowledges the comment with a smile. The father immediately flies into a jealous rage, slapping Amalia's face in full view of the other passengers, as Delia, implicated in mother's shame, looks away in dismay. The confusion of responsibility, discomfort and shame that marks the young girl's relation to the mother in this scene is duplicated in relation to her own body and to her vulnerability in the public space.

This long scene on the bus – both in the present and in the flashback – follows a pattern repeated elsewhere in the film, in its shift from public space to subjective space, from present to past, from a broad palette of realistic colour tones in the present to a monochromatic rendering of the past that is reminiscent of the cinematic style of the 1950s. This progression is accompanied by the realistic use of diegetic sound in the present tense of the narration, and a subsequent filtering out of diegetic sound to suggest absorption in the subjective space of the flashback. The transition is marked within this sequence by a brief glimpse of the Bay of Naples. Water bears negative connotations throughout *L'amore molesto*, where it is generally associated with contamination, a loss of control, or a failure of boundary definitions. In the economy of the film it is not a purifying agent, but a sinister, unruly fluid – the sea that drowns the



Peppe Lanzetta and Anna Bonaiuto in *L'amore molesto*.

mother, the dripping tap in an empty apartment that signals her senility, the torrential shower that drenches Delia causing her makeup to run down her face and her dress to cling to her body, and finally the murky water of the swimming pool where Delia halfheartedly masturbates the man who was her childhood friend, an act performed under a sign stating that patrons are required to take a shower before entering the pool

Drawing on both Nancy Chodorow's and Luce Irigaray's theories of the maternal, Gillian Rose has argued that boys and girls are placed differently into positions of knowledge and power, and that these positions imply different relationships to space and the body.<sup>23</sup> This is illustrated in *L'amore molesto* in the way that women's access to space is predetermined by the patriarchal agency of the city. Though the physical space of Naples is frequently deployed in the film as enclosed, womb-like areas, the symbolic agency that controls this space is clearly masculine. Thus the male characters (Delia's father and uncle, her middle-aged, childhood friend Antonio and her mother's elderly suitor Caserta) are shown moving about the city with self-confident determination, transgressing the personal boundaries of others, often with violence. The relationship of the female characters (principally Delia and her mother) to the urban space is more guarded and circumspect. A strict protocol of movement, clothing and the gaze seems to regulate their circulation within the city. While sitting in the bus watching the other passengers, Delia's androgynous attire offers her a degree of protection, renders her virtually invisible. Later, when she is unexpectedly obliged to continue her search around the city in a skimpy red dress she had not intended to wear in public, she becomes significantly more vulnerable to unwanted attention

Spatial transgression and the risk of contamination seem, however, to be a necessary factor in Delia's progression towards self-knowledge within the economy of *L'amore molesto*. In attempting to discover the truth about her mother's death as well as her own past, she must surrender her fastidiousness. When she becomes willing to explore the porous boundaries between the clean and the not clean, between the self and the (m)other, she is enabled to recall her repressed secret at the very site of her childhood trauma

Clues regarding the whereabouts of her mother's ageing suitor lead Delia to an abandoned building that once housed a pastry shop where she had played as a child. Despite the warning of a man loitering on the street that the neighbourhood is unsafe, she proceeds to enter the dark space of the derelict store. The interior wall still bears traces of a large painting dominated by shades of deep blue that she had repeatedly recalled in flashbacks to her childhood, a work of kitsch displaying scantily clad, dark-skinned women against the backdrop of an exotic landscape.

As Delia attempts to find her bearings, she observes a shadow on

the far side of a frosted door-pane. Upon investigation, it turns out to be Amalia's familiar blue suit, hanging in a room now apparently inhabited by the mother's senile friend Caserta. This eerie, voided garment hanging in the derelict space presents a striking figure of lack and absence, and offers itself as a ghostly trace of the mother's body. Delia immediately changes into the suit, adopting it as a fetish, and experimenting with the mother's own masquerade. Here, and elsewhere in the film, the crossing of boundaries previously considered repellent leads to new knowledge. Seated in the place of her childhood violation, she is thus able to invoke memories of the event that had prompted her initial alienation from Amalia. The sequence unfolds in flashback, as Delia remembers that she had falsely accused her mother of the sexual act that she herself had been forced to submit to by her aggressor in this basement room.

The presence of the 'exotic' painting of African women within this space of exploitation and sexual violence raises the issue of the functioning of the imaginary in the structuring of knowledge, power and privilege. There are recurrent allusions in the film to a series of paintings executed by Delia's father of a voluptuous, bare-breasted gypsy in a red dress. He had made a living producing such images, along with landscapes that we see lying about his studio, images of romantic kitsch to be sold at the market, presumably to tourists. In another, earlier flashback to childhood, Delia remembers observing that the gypsy in these paintings resembled her mother, and receiving a slap in response. Thus she came to understand that, according to the rules of patriarchy, the discursive categories of mother and sexual woman must be kept distinct. Yet in the pastry shop that bears the sign *Coloniali* (colonial products), similar images of voluptuous femininity presided over the everyday commerce of edible goods and, ultimately, over the sexual violation of Delia herself. The child Delia grew up under these fantasies of femininity and alterity – the scantily clad African women and the voluptuous gypsy, presented as consumable objects of exchange. Thus she learned the masquerade of femininity and the discursive splitting that supports it.

Allusions to the gypsy paintings in the flashbacks lend to Delia's ultimate fantasies of her mother's last moments a particularly poignant note. As she returns by train to Bologna, Delia imagines Amalia dancing on the beach on the night of her death. In the daughter's fantasy the mother wears a flowing red robe (one of the items she had purchased for Delia's birthday), as she sways tipsily by the light of a campfire, impersonating the gypsy in the paintings remembered from years before. The fantasy concludes as Delia imagines Amalia tearfully casting off her masquerade. In a rear shot, we then see her make her final, naked descent towards the sea.

Mario Martone's *L'amore molesto* raises many crucial issues rarely alluded to in recent Italian films. It resonates on a psychoanalytical level as a story of mother-daughter desire and loss, and on a social

24 See Luisa Muraro *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (Rome: Riuniti, 1991) and Adriana Cavarero *In Spite of Plato* (trans. Serena Anderlini D'Onofrio and Aine O Healy) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

level as a story of the sexual abuse of female children. In particular, it problematizes the relationship of mothers and daughters by foregrounding their alienation from each other through the operations of patriarchal society, an issue that has been foremost in the writings of Italian feminist theorists.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, it is one of the few films in Italian cinema of the past twenty years with a strong female protagonist who focalizes the narrative. Though the leading actress (Anna Bonaiuto) appears on screen throughout the action, often scantily dressed and occasionally nude, her body is never fetishized as object of the gaze. Photographed without flattery or compromise, her appearance grows increasingly haggard and fatigued as the film progresses, though the spectator's sympathy for her character's predicament is sustained by the narrative throughout. The physical presence of Angela Luce, who plays Delia's elderly mother, is deployed by *L'amore molesto* in a similarly unconventional manner. A popular Neapolitan actress, Luce is known to international audiences for her role as the adulterous wife Peronella in Pasolini's *Decameron* (1971), where she appears nude in one of the most exuberantly sexual sequences constructed in that film. In Martone's film, by contrast, her ageing, naked body, shot from behind as she makes her way unsteadily towards the sea, is rendered with a kind of pathos rarely achieved in such portrayals, while complicated and enlivened by the intertextual link to Pasolini's work.

*L'amore molesto*, *Morte di un matematico napoletano* and *Teatro di guerra* offer a complex construction of the familial, social and spatial mapping of Naples, defying previous cinematic stereotypes. In Martone's vision of the city, its hybridity and contradictoriness are exposed rather than disavowed. But his construction remains ambivalent, despite his expressed interest in recovering an 'authentic' Naples beneath the political corruption and the social or architectural excrescences accumulated over the years. Resisting linguistic compromise, Martone's films make extensive use of Neapolitan dialect (Delia's 'mother tongue'), which has presented problems of intelligibility, particularly for audiences of *L'amore molesto*. This insistent use of dialect forcefully draws attention to the relation of periphery to centre, a cultural and political issue often disavowed or downplayed by mainstream cinema and other media which tend to manifest a preference for instantly 'consumable' forms of Italian. Finally, and most significantly, the films of Martone foreground the deployment of the body in space in new and provocative ways, paying particular attention to the intersection of spatiality with the performance of gendered identities. The familiar, 'porous' space of Naples provides a particularly interesting theatre for this exploration, since the fluidity of its boundaries may be at once a source of peril and discovery.

# Performing Paris: myths of the city in Robert Siodmak's emigre musical *La Vie Parisienne*

ALASTAIR PHILLIPS

Robert Siodmak did not like films based on operettas. Yet in 1936, as an emigre from the studios of Berlin in the city of Paris, he directed a lavishly funded version of Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*. My interest in this hitherto unrecognized moment in film history is twofold. Firstly, the depiction of 'the city of light' by an outsider, particularly through the popular musical form of an operetta, suggests a new way of looking at the cinematic representation of urban place. Secondly, this musical of sorts about Paris, directed by a German and based on a production originally written by a fellow German in Paris the previous century, might also serve as a reminder of the complexities inherent in talking about the historical specificities of European national cinema. I will begin by considering the notion of Parisian spectacle which, as Siegfried Kracauer points out, was as appropriate for the visitor as the native resident. 'Offenbach's music, like Charlie Chaplin's films', he wrote, 'were an international phenomenon in an age of international development'.<sup>1</sup> According to Tim Clark, spectacle 'points to the way in which the city (and social life in general) was presented as a unity in the later nineteenth century, as a separate something made to be looked at – an image, a pantomime, a panorama'.<sup>2</sup> How did Siodmak, as a temporary resident of Paris, refer to this in his filmic representation of the capital? Clark's suggestive condensation of looking and performance leads to the question of pleasure and entertainment. What exactly was the relationship of this emigre film to pre-existing city-based forms of

<sup>1</sup> Siegfried Kracauer *Offenbach and the Paris of His Time* (London: Constable 1937) p. 140

<sup>2</sup> Tim Clark *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson 1990) p. 63

live entertainment? Finally, I want to consider how the 'City of Light' was represented by personnel who came from a different urban culture, namely that of Berlin. Did *La Vie Parisienne* picture the city in ways which subscribed to the conventions of popular Parisian filmic practice or can a difference be discerned? Furthermore, could this difference foreshadow the unique three-way relationship between Berlin, Paris and Hollywood that emigres such as Siodmak embodied, with Paris being seen as a kind of staging post between the past of Germany and the future of the USA?

Paris which had always amused me on holiday, was too lovely. . . . It captured me with its pleasant carefreeness. . . . The night porter



Original poster for Robert Siodmak's film of Jacques Offenbach's operetta *La Vie Parisienne*.



down in the plush entrance hall [of the hotel] . . . invited me to a *coup de rouge* and prophesied 'it will sort itself out, sir, I am sure of it' Everyone in the world has two fatherlands. his own and Paris.<sup>3</sup>

- 3 Max Ophüls in Kevin MacDonald 'Emeric Pressburger the Life and Death of a Screenwriter' (London: Faber 1994) p. 101

It is unlikely whether Robert Siodmak shared Max Ophüls's rhapsodic impressions regarding his place of exile (he apparently spent the whole of his time in France without a valid work permit), but *La Vie Parisienne* conforms in different ways to the consolidating myth of Paris as a site of cosmopolitan belonging. The idea of Paris as a spectacle for visitors to consume and admire has as one of its main antecedents the development of the physical spaces of the city under Hausmann in the nineteenth century. Hausmann's redesign of Paris, with the more or less wholesale clearing and redevelopment of its central areas, effected two significant results regarding the way that the city could be viewed. Firstly, in architectural, and therefore spatial, terms the strategic urban panoramic view was developed. This led to an enhanced sense of promotional civic display based on the principles of seeing and looking. Christopher Prendergast argues that the emergence of widely distributed all-night street lighting, for example, served an allegorical, as well as a practical, function. 'The public provision of light represented a triumph over social and cultural "darkness", light meant *lumières* in more than one sense; the project of the illuminated city became cognate with the idea of the enlightened city'.<sup>4</sup>

- 4 Christopher Prendergast *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell 1995) p. 183

Secondly, largely as a result of this enhanced potential to be viewed, a whole subsidiary set of social practices emerged to do with the way the city was not just experienced by its own residents but imagined by those from afar. These ranged from the development of window displays in department stores (aided by the introduction of sheet glass and modulated lighting features) to the spread of photographic and lithographic reproductions of 'sites of interest'. This was the time of the spread of guidebooks for the traveller to Paris and, very importantly, the emergence of the picture postcard as a means of sending Paris as it was pictured to the provinces and overseas. The popularity of the spectacular view of the city was developed with the running series of *Expositions Universelles*, one of which, in 1867, coincided with the first production of Offenbach's operetta *La Vie Parisienne*.<sup>5</sup> At such exhibitions the world came to Paris twice over: firstly in a physical sense as paying visitors, and secondly in a metaphorical sense in the form of such erected displays as the 'Rue des Nations' (1878), with its facade of architectural styles from around the globe. Paris was then sent back to the world in the form of pictorial messages, most spectacularly exemplified in 1889, when enthusiastic visitors could post Parisian images from the top of that recently erected emblem of urban modernity, the Eiffel Tower.

- 5 The actual premiere of the operetta was on the 31 October 1866 at the Palais Royal

Both the original production of *La Vie Parisienne* and Siodmak's loose adaptation refer explicitly to this idea of Paris defining itself both *against* the world, as something distinctive and unique, and *within* the world, as the centre for a kind of communal cosmopolitanism. It is surely not coincidental that both the theatrical and film production are the work of German outsiders who found themselves producing work inside the capital about the capital. The plot of the Offenbach operetta concerns the amorous and mercenary entanglements of a visiting wealthy Brazilian baron, his wife, his mistress and two scheming Parisian fortune-hunters. The film version of the operetta retains the cosmopolitan narrative hinge of the visiting wealthy colonial to the capital of pleasure, but enlarges the range of entanglements by having Don Ramiro (Max Dearly) leave his mistress and Paris in 1900, and return in 1936 with his granddaughter Helenita (Conchita Montenegro). In 1936 the exuberant Brazilian is still up to amorous indulgences and excessively energetic visits to places of entertainment. There are several key scenes set in hotel rooms and train stations which evoke the sense of Paris belonging not just to its residents, but to the world. At significant intersections in the plot of the film, a postcard-like image is visualized to reinforce the dazzling spectacle of the city's world of light. After a scene in a drab, functional 1936 immigration office, for example, an official moves to a window. Whilst opening the left shutter he declares 'This is Paris'. The right shutter opens of its own accord, and dissolves into a panoramic night skyline image of the city with the illuminated Eiffel Tower on the horizon and the rooftops of apartments in the foreground. To reinforce the pictorialization of the city, the camera tracks slowly back to frame the image with the bordering element of the window. The film begins with a tableau shot of the theatre *La Vie Parisienne* at nighttime; again the Eiffel Tower in the background, and this time the twinkling features of the City of Light break up the darkness. The effect is of an instantly recognizable, iconic, display of *Parisianisme*. It could be the cover of a guidebook from the period.

In *La Vie Parisienne*, we see a blurring between staged or imagined Paris and a 'real' Paris perceived through communal experience. The theatrical version of the city that *La Vie Parisienne* promises in the opening tableau is correlated with the space of the city itself, as if to suggest they form one seamless whole.<sup>6</sup> The sequence thus evokes the sense of Paris as a communal home – a place of belonging – by developing the way the worlds of the theatre and the city intersect. After the opening tableau, the filmic spectator is taken on a journey from 'Parisian life' to *La Vie Parisienne* by the figure of a visiting male customer who descends from his carriage to a slow, romantic musical score. The camera lingers, in a medium closeup shot, on the steps outside, with the doorman standing on the left and a poster announcing 'La Vie Parisienne With Lianne

<sup>6</sup> See M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1994) on the shifting relationship between urban space and theatrical space.

d'Isigny' to the right. The visitor passes the ticket desk and the music begins to surge in anticipation as he ascends the stairs. The moment he exits the frame, the film cuts to a high-angle shot revealing the conclusion of a raucous revue number. Audience members are visible in the lower part of the frame, but the energy and near chaos of the performers' gyrating bodies dominates the image. This intensity of feeling is at odds with the quietude of the preceding sequence, so that the impression is of a concentrated emotionality. This emotionality works as a bond for the diegetic audience members, one of whom, in a subsequent shot, blows a kiss to the performers. The cast raise their hands in unison, as if in return, as the music reaches its climax. This contract between the audience and the performers is re-enacted when we cut from a backstage aerial shot of the cast preparing to bow to the audience to a full-frontal, proscenium shot of the curtains opening on a crowded stage from the point of view of those clapping.

The sense of a shared 'Paris', created by the emotionality of the bond between audience and performers, is also suggested in the final part of the preface to the film's main narrative, which takes place at the railway station. There is a long, steady tracking shot which details the many departing couples on the platform, but instead of following the direction of the train, the camera moves in reverse towards the city which is being left behind. This allows one to make sense of the use of the previously mentioned chorus as musical accompaniment. The lightly ironic use of operetta music and accompanying visual style evokes a powerful sense of leave-taking which is developed in the subsequent shot from the point of view of the passengers looking out of the train onto the platform and the faces of those they are leaving behind. The emphasis, again, is on the communality of the experience. When the film shifts to the present and the return of Don Ramiro to Paris after a long absence, his arrival, this time at an airport, is preceded in the film by another musical sequence set in period costume at a railway station. This time, although the musical chorus is the same, the scene is not 'real Paris' but the stage. The two have become blurred once more.

Stodmak's musical appropriates a cluster of mythologies regarding the city of Paris. The film develops meaning in its narrative through a journey to the capital on the part of non-Parisians. Either during the journey, or as a result of the journey, ideas to do with urban spectacle and display are foregrounded in the text by means of the protagonists' encounter with specifically Parisian performance and entertainment. The film's use of the idea of Paris as the centre of 'light' and pleasure may be read in two ways. Firstly, by placing itself in relation to the traditions of Parisian live performance as well as 1930s French film practice, the film actively engages in the

reification of certain notions of *Parisianisme*, and thus fits in with the prevalent culture. Secondly, the negotiation between the visitor and embedded traditions of popular pleasure in the diegesis may be read in terms of the metatextual journey of the emigre personnel who came to Paris themselves to find work in the French film industry. Does this suggestion trouble an attempt to read the film as a smooth adaptation to convention? To answer this question and examine more fully the particular work of *La Vie Parisienne* in relation to the way Paris was pictured, I will define more exactly the components of this 'light' tradition of Parisian representation. In doing so I will examine further what sorts of myths are proposed in their differing configurations

Thus far 'Paris' has been foregrounded in the light tradition, in terms of a sustained bond between live performance and audience. This is because notions of what constitutes the city have, to some extent, historically been bound up with performance and consumption in the sphere of entertainment. It is not surprising, therefore, that acts of display and acts of viewing and communal imagining also feature in many French urban cinematic representations of the 1930s. As previously mentioned, it is possible to equate this showing and imagining of the city with the historical emergence of practices associated with the spectacle of The City of Light. The very lighting-up of the city (and spaces of performance) – by replacing the standard gas lamp with electricity, developing a culture of civic promotion, and the actual 'lightening' of urban space by the removal of dense networks of medieval street complexes – relates to the concurrent emergence of a commodified and bourgeois culture of diversion and entertainment. Clark argues the same point by stating that

the rise of commercialized entertainments in Paris, catering to a mass public . . . cannot be understood apart from . . . the end of old patterns of neighbourhood and the birth of a city organized round separate unities of work, residence and distraction.<sup>7</sup>

This process undoubtedly helped to propagate a master narrative of an association between Paris, performance and pleasure which spread far outside the capital. It also, symbolically, allowed for the enhancement of the equation between capital and nation – Paris was France. By the 1930s and the arrival of the emigres in Paris, live entertainment in the city had evolved to the extent that the working-class or petit-bourgeois tradition of the localized neighbourhood *café-concert*, which 'combined the socializing aspect of the café with the consumer aspect of spectatorship', had waned considerably.<sup>8</sup> It had not totally disappeared, but the more formalized *revue à grand spectacle* or the *spectacle de variétés*, which had begun to emerge in hand with the new viewing practices of the city, had risen to considerable prominence.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Clark *The Painting of Modern Life* p. 235

<sup>8</sup> See Ginette Vincendeau *French cinema of the 1930s* (University of East Anglia PhD thesis 1985) p. 153

<sup>9</sup> Bach and Milton: two of the most popular comic male entertainers in the 1930s film industry; for example, both came from *café concert* backgrounds.

These newer types of consolidated performance offered the pleasure, as their names suggest, of spectacle, whether of the order of elaborate and costly staged music and song numbers, or a succession of variety acts consisting of acrobats, magicians and the like. Many of the embedded notions about the popular image of light Paris derived from a sustained relationship between performers and public which had failed to dissipate, despite the shift from an intimate milieu to one of stage-bound spectacle. Indeed, it was partly because of this heavy commercialization of light entertainment that a mythical version of the city emerged.

The idea of an image of the city being enacted in direct and quite small-scale terms by a contract between the performer and live neighbourhood audience (through the address of song lyrics for example) was slowly replaced by the emergence of a different entertainment complex. At the heart of this complex, which amplified the staging of an image of the city, was an urban-centred star system which propagated the closeness of the performer to the public in terms beyond that of the intimacy fostered by watching live performance. In the proliferation of song-sheets, illustrated journals, posters and front-of-house publicity material we can see the emergence of an extended 'Parisian community'. This dates back to entertainment figures such as Thérèse, of whom it was written at the time: 'she is a woman of the people . . . she represents life as it is in the city'.<sup>10</sup>

By the 1930s this correspondence between print media, performer and public had been strengthened by new forms of city-oriented communication practices. Boulevard theatre, music hall and cabaret now co-existed with the mass media of cinema and gramophone recordings, to the extent that 'the relationship between cinema and other entertainment forms [can] be seen in a multi-dimensional way rather than as a one-dimensional, linear connection of influence or of one form's decline signalling the rise of another one'.<sup>11</sup> This multi-dimensionality, which also intersects with radio, was still bound up with the relationship between Paris and performance. This is not the same as saying that because so much of the entertainment industry was based in a relatively concentrated area of Paris things inevitably had a Parisian identity, though this was to a great extent true. Rather, the city was performed in the sense of a *historically* calibrated collusion between public and personnel. For example, through a combination of lyrics, staging, and evident sheer charisma, the body of music-hall, cabaret or theatrical performers (many of whom moved in and out of film production) was now linked with the body of the city. Large-scale stars such as Joséphine Baker, Mistinguett and Maurice Chevalier, who had performed in venues like the *Folies Bergère*, or the appositely named *Casino de Paris*, were intimately associated with the city in the popular imagination through song (Mistinguett's 'Ça! C'est Paris!', for example), titles of revues, or critical and fan commentary. Performers such as Albert Préjean had

<sup>10</sup> Jules Valles in Dominique Jando *Histoire mondiale du music hall* (Paris: Jean Pierre Delarges 1979) p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Vincendeau 'French cinema of the 1930s' p. 115.

adopted as a definitive part of their routine significant items of working-class male Parisian iconography such as the flat cap. In comic boulevard theatre the delivery of precisely orchestrated witticisms, in high-society settings, by trained actors had become emblematic of a certain metropolitan sophistication

As Ginette Vincendeau has suggested, this shift in the organization of popular entertainment led to the subsequent reification of a mythical community which served distinctive ideological functions. By the time sound cinema in the 1930s was actually able to insert a diegetic audience into the 'live' performance of music-hall entertainers such as Georges Milton, Maurice Chevalier and so on, 'Paris – and particularly popular Paris – had by then come to connote France, embodying the myth of a deeply-rooted community of origins'.<sup>12</sup>

These modes of performance and the subsequent notions of 'community' were, of course, inflected by class in terms of the type of representations they offered and the type of audiences they attracted. In the case of the work of René Clair, for example, whose films are axiomatic when it comes to any discussion of the representation of the French capital in the period of the early 1930s, Paris meant a pleasurable, detailed and inherently nostalgic evocation of a world in which the quotidian lives of urban working people are integrated into a prominent community of interests. By means of dextrously interwoven music, sound, set design and performances (by the likes of the aforementioned Préjean in *Sous les toits de Paris* [1929]) he achieved a folk-based and sentimental appropriation of a milieu which had come to connote a dominant notion of iconic Frenchness. Through the inscription of songs such as 'A Paris dans chaque faubourg',<sup>13</sup> and the foregrounded motif of circularity (and thus inclusiveness) in the mise-en-scene in the film *Quatorze juillet* (1932), we can see how certain codified mythologies about the capital were sustained into the era of sound cinema.<sup>14</sup>

The centrality of these mythologies of togetherness, resourcefulness and convivial sharing reminds us of Clark's central argument regarding the relationship between performers and audience at the Parisian *café-concert*. He suggests that 'the *café-concert* produced the popular, which is to say that it put on class as entertainment'.<sup>15</sup> In *Quatorze juillet*, for example, we can see the entertainment of the film as fitting Clark's description of 'a fiction of working-class ways of being'. put alongside a parody of middle-class style, the one being granted imaginary dominion over the other'.<sup>16</sup> The image of the warm, working-class pleasure is, crucially, defined against the cold rectitude of the bourgeoisie, the circularity of the dancing, decoration and camera movement which represents the idealized working-class community, is contrasted with a diagonal linear camera movement and an emphasis on rigid straight lines in the set design in the depiction of the middle-class other.

12 Ginette Vincendeau 'From the *Bal Populaire* to the casino: class and leisure in French films of the 1930s' *Nottingham French Studies* vol. 31 no. 2 (1992) p. 55

13 Sung by the *chanteuse réaliste* Lys Gauty in the famous recorded version

14 Images of street children playing and visual accounts of the urban working classes integrating leisure and national pride can also be found in the myriad of photo-journalistic publications of the era

15 Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* p. 238

16 *Ibid.* p. 238

- 17 Adrian Rifkin *Street Noises  
Parisian Pleasures 1900–1940*  
(Manchester: Manchester  
University Press 1994)

There is another class location that has always existed with its own set of mythologies. As Adrian Rifkin implicitly states when he claims that ‘Paris can as well be typified through the society lady as the *madinette*’,<sup>17</sup> an imaginary map of the city composed according to co-ordinates of entertainment must take into account more than the spaces accorded to the working-class community. It must be read in terms of gender and sexuality too. Again, this version of the city works against the standards of bourgeois propriety. The mythical Paris which pertains to the idea of the complex of sexuality, permissiveness and luxury moves, in spatial terms, from salon to theatre and from opera to cabaret and nightclub. These representations, very often coded as feminine, partly stem from the nineteenth-century comic farce traditions of Feydeau and Labiche, and the verbal wit and disruptive gender comedy of Beaumarchais in the eighteenth century. They were sustained by the growth of urban performance spaces in the nineteenth century, as well as the steady commodification of the female body in relation to the material culture available in the streets of Hausmann’s Paris. Through advertising and shop window displays in the new spaces of the city, an association between France, femininity, luxury and sexuality was consolidated and indelibly promoted. Entertainment forms such as the comic opera, and the increasingly licentious spectacle of the *Belle époque* cabaret and the world of *gai Paris*, embodied this tradition as well as opening it to certain cross-class movements on the part of the *demi-mondaine*. The literary character of Zola’s *Nana*, for example, embodies the figure of the *courtisane*, the kept woman of wealthy married aristocrats and bourgeois bachelor society figures who flourished at the time of Offenbach’s original production.

- 18 Prendergast *Paris and the  
Nineteenth Century* p. 138

Such figures raise the issue of what Prendergast calls ‘an increasingly opaque and fluid urban reality’, and the difficulty of keeping track of the identities and movements of the unregistered prostitute.<sup>18</sup> He sees the obsessive abundance of documentation (both visual and literary) of prostitution in the nineteenth century as evidence of an anxiety about the place of the prostitute as a metaphor for Paris. Despite the strict and hypocritical prostitution and censorship laws of the period, ‘the “woman” – in particular the transgressing, adulterous woman – [was] always the site of social and sexual trouble, a trouble of classification, a problem of *identity*’.<sup>19</sup>

- 19 *Ibid.* p. 137

We can see this blurring occur, for instance, in *La Vie Parisienne* through the figure of Lianne (Marcelle Prance), who is linked to both versions of Paris – the city of society and bourgeois spectacle and the Paris of the *petit peuple*. As the star of the *La Vie Parisienne* revue and the mistress of Don Ramiro, Lianne encapsulates the principal set of mythical elements that the first version of light Paris offered. In the prologue of the film, set in 1900, the ‘world’ of Paris created by the emotionality of the bond between audience and

performers spills into the subsequent dressing-room party. This 'world' is sustained by a good-humoured and vigorous depiction of conviviality, luxury, romance and an extravagant celebration of the good life amongst the cast and clientele of the theatre. Lianne is a figurehead of this Paris. She represents conviviality because her sociable presence generates affection and attention. This conviviality extends to a form of cosmopolitanism by means of the inclusion of her Brazilian lover. Paris can thus accommodate the world.

Lianne also embodies a blending of sexuality and romance which is a continuation of the performance on stage. There is a sense of licentiousness and permissiveness revealed by the way in which she displays her body – her undergarments slip down for all to see. Later, in the main part of the film, when she is reunited with Don Ramiro, their relationship is far more flirtatious and physical than the sober coupling of Don Ramiro's granddaughter and Jacques (Georges Rigaud). Luxury and the good life are indicated by the spirited consumption of champagne, itself almost a meta-symbol for a certain strata of French culture. Champagne is drunk at the toast announced on the occasion of Don Ramiro's impending departure to 'savage Brazil'. He declares that he is 'leaving his heart behind', and, it appears, because of the wording of the toast – 'vive l'amour et la vie Parisienne' – the object of his affection is a conflation of the city and the female.<sup>20</sup> This is appropriate, for 'Lianne' is undoubtedly a transposition of the real Lianne de Pougy, one of the 'Queens of Paris' who came to fame and certain notoriety around the turn of the century.<sup>21</sup> Like women such as Caroline Otero, Lianne de Pougy, a dancer from the *demi-monde*, led a life of much publicized scandal. Her ambivalent class status is important, for it reminds us that Lianne in the film is not of the same background as Don Ramiro. In 1936, rather overweight and extravagantly adorned and clothed, she cuts a somewhat awkward figure. Her unaffected manner, and inappropriate toast to the engagement of the new lovers at the sophisticated nightclub table, suggests a different social world, which somehow has to exist in contradiction with the celebratory impetus of the Parisian myth.

*La Vie Parisienne* succeeds in reconciling these differing elements by having Lianne literally save the day. In the montage sequence which follows Lianne's 'call to arms', we see the city open up from the milieu of entertainment and, for the first time, a glimpse of the working life of the city is visible, as well as more detailed location footage of a modern Paris, firmly aligned with the social world of 1936.

Through a visualized bond of association with the values of Lianne's emotional appeal, the citizens of this modern Paris, despite all the trappings of modernity, rally together to reaffirm the myth that the Paris (France) Lianne adores is still alive in their hearts. In this way the world of present Paris is seen in terms of continuity.

<sup>20</sup> This attitude was the norm for wealthy male visitors to Paris at the time. See, for example, this prescient quote (in terms of the narrative of *La Vie Parisienne*) by Leon Gozlan in 1852 on 'What it is that makes a Parisienne. According to the opinion of foreigners she is a composite of spirit, grace and sensibility, an inexhaustible source of seduction, the resounding justification for the superiority of France above other nations, the woman one dreams of at sixteen and the one one remembers at sixty.' Quoted in Jean Goulemot and Daniel Oster, *La Vie Parisienne: Anthologie des mœurs du XIX siècle* (Paris: Sand/Conti, 1989), p. 249.

<sup>21</sup> Liane de Pougy actually starred in the Offenbach Revue at the Moulin Rouge in 1904.



rather than disjuncture with the past. Lianne's plot is hatched, significantly, backstage at *La Vie Parisienne*. A despairing Don Ramiro states that it is necessary to have an army to defeat his son. 'Well, I have one', she replies, 'All my friends. My old friends. The friends of Lianne d'Isigny'. 'That's a marvellous idea, but what are you going to call it all?', he asks. At this point, the on-stage music changes and rises in tone. The main theme of the film returns and Lianne moves her head to listen. Her eyes and face are alight with inspiration, and with her finger pointing upwards she declares 'La Vie Parisienne!' We then see Lianne seated at a table writing a letter. Just as the figure of a Parisian female *chanteuse* has sung earlier in the film to unite the two lovers, so Lianne speaks through the power of the memory of *her* singing to bring the couple together permanently. The camera slowly tracks closer to her as her voice can be heard speaking. 'It is necessary to remember again the France that I adore'. The shot dissolves to the previously seen nighttime image of rooftop Paris. Overlaying this canonical representation of the city is a montage of a succession of envelopes, to suggest that the city is being written to, or that the spirit of the city itself is doing the 'writing', as in the sense of the city 'speaking' through the use of neon lettering in urban musicals of the period. Each postal destination is shown with Lianne's letters appearing onscreen. There is a reprise of the music which 'inspired' her in a softer, gentler key, as the occupant of the building reads the text of the letter. The same tracking in camera motif that accompanied the original composition of the plea is repeated to underscore the sense of Lianne's voice speaking. One of the recipients is, interestingly, a fellow emigre – a Russian prince. He is set in an almost parodic, noirish milieu, seated on the edge of a taxi in a raincoat. To underline his difference, the musical theme is relayed by a more sombre oboe. There is a cut to a high-angle shot of the street. Near darkness prevails, except for a light source from the left of the image which highlights the contours of a line of parked, black cars. Four men in long, dark coats are silhouetted to the rear. The emigre gestures to the others, and in the next medium closeup shot he passes the letter to one of them. There is then a cut to a sudden closeup of just the envelope. This produces an absolute contrast between the whiteness of its contours and the blackness of the night.

The film then moves on to the mass production of newspapers, and a sequence which deals with the printing and distribution of an editorial in the appropriately named *Le Petit Parisien*. The editor tells his female typists he is changing the editorial to one entitled 'Hats Off To The People of Paris!'. There then follows a semi-modernist montage which, partly through the energy and vigour of the editing and partly through the onscreen action of printing presses, photographs, motorcyclists and so on, creates a sense of the energy within the contemporary city being harnessed. Stylistically, instead of

<sup>22</sup> There is a very similar sequence two years later in *Le Crime de M. Lange* (Jean Renoir 1936)

looking back to Berlin, Siodmak looks forward, as it were, to a Hollywood-esque visualization of the pace of urban life.<sup>22</sup>

When the stiffly formal father tries to leave Paris with his daughter, it is as if the city refuses to let them leave. The porters at his hotel plaster his suitcase with a telling photo of himself, which has been printed all over the city to reveal the heartlessness of the man. Taxis cannot be hailed, and while buses stop, they pretend to be full when the conductor realizes the potential passenger is Don Ramiro's son. Father and daughter finally hitch a lift on the back of a lorry, but the driver takes them miles away from the station. In a moment of imagistic self-reflexivity, the shot of the laughing men in the front of the lorry is freeze-framed and then shown to be printed on the cover of a newspaper with the caption: 'Bravo and Thank You!' It is because of Lianne's different background that she is able to contact this second version of light Paris – 'the Paris that I hold so dear' – and enlist the working citizens of the city in the campaign to save the romance between Jacques and Don Ramiro's granddaughter. Although we never see Lianne directly with the ordinary population of the city, it is clear that this is the world from which she came as a performer. Lianne, in fact, through her class mobility, embodies the overarching myth of the 'great Paris festival': that Paris, coded in feminine terms, is a communal home to one and all.

So far in this article I have argued that Siodmak's musical is suggestive of the way in which the work of a prominent emigre intersects with established modes of urban representation. *La Vie Parisienne* pays attention to the blurring of staged and 'real' Paris, and pictures the city, to a great extent, in concordance with a historically and nationally specific relationship between performance and the urban public. We have seen how this collusion extends to the depiction of onscreen communities and their recognition in terms of the issue of class. But it is apparent, in terms of both narrative and textual style, that the film also relays a sense of instability. This is suggested by the number of journeyings between past and present that are present diegetically and extratextually in aspects of the conclusion to the film. To some degree, the components of Parisian mythology reduce or reconvene the instability in the film's hybrid nature, but I now want to argue that it is only through acknowledging the centrality of this hybridity to the film's history and meanings that one can fully make sense of how 'light Paris' was pictured by emigre personnel.

In a number of complementary contexts *La Vie Parisienne* is a paradigmatic example of the kind of hybrid cinema that the emigre French cinema produced. Interestingly, Seymour Nebenzahl (Siodmak's cousin) had originally considered another emigre from Germany, G.W. Pabst, to direct the production of Offenbach's

operetta. Family loyalty prevailed, however, perhaps because the previous year Siodmak had worked on a script of the life of Hortense Schneider – the celebrated lead of the original stage production. The film was bankrolled by United Artists and two versions were shot simultaneously, with Neil Hamilton taking Georges Rigaud's part in the English-language version. It was a prestigious production in a number of ways. Firstly, compared with the then average shooting time of not more than a month for French productions, the shoot stretched to five months. This was necessary because of the huge investment in set design and the subsequent requirements for shot construction. Eighty sets, designed by the prominent decorator Jacques Colombier, were built and real locations were used, including the Café de la Paix. Secondly, as an obvious consequence of the expectations of the production company, a large-scale publicity campaign was arranged. The revealing slogan 'A Piquant Cocktail of Three Generations' accompanied unusually lavish colour brochures. All of this was to little avail however, and the film achieved only modest returns. In one sense, the publicity of *La Vie Parisienne* might also have read 'A Piquant Cocktail of Three Cultures', because the production does more than remind us of the place of operetta in Parisian culture. As well as implicitly looking back to the heyday of Parisian operetta, Siodmak's film, as a commercial enterprise, looks sideways to the success, in audience and filmic terms, of exported Austro-German operettas such as *Le Chemin du paradis* (Thiele/de Vaucorbeil, 1930) and the ongoing powerful model of Hollywood, city-oriented musical entertainment.

The film needs firstly, therefore, to be contextualized in terms of a number of differing orders of urban entertainment and representation. When Offenbach – like Siodmak a German Jew by origin – died in 1880 a musical critic wrote that 'the sun of French operetta has set'.<sup>23</sup> The use of a light metaphor is appropriate for a man who in his work, particularly with the librettists Halévy and Meilhac, had consolidated a mythical association between Paris and the pleasures of spirited leisure, sharp wit and musical *joie de vivre*. *La Vie Parisienne* was emblematic of the image of the capital which he had propagated from his own theatre, the aptly named Les Bouffes-Parisiens in the Passage Choiseul. As has often been pointed out, the operetta was rarely called just that. In most cases the term *opéra-comique* or *opéra-bouffe* was used to describe an increasingly loose amalgam of comic performance and scripted musical entertainment. Historically, because of the 'pure' form's relative decline after the commencement of the Third Republic, the heyday of French operetta has been linked to the end of the Second Empire. Thus, as with so much Parisian entertainment, a certain in-built reflex of nostalgic imagining emerged with successive attempts to revivify the genre. In an ironic foreshadowing of the state of cinematic operations in the early 1930s, French operetta, always a carrier for a set of

23 E. Fournier, *La Renaissance de l'opérette: Lectures Pour Tous* (October 1932) p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Lecocq in an article in *7 Jours* (March 1905) also made the point that the cost of putting on true operetta had become almost prohibitive

<sup>25</sup> *Soir* 19 August 1925

<sup>26</sup> *Comedia* 9 November 1925

<sup>27</sup> *Ami du peuple* 5 January 1930

<sup>28</sup> Vincendeau French cinema of the 1930s p 143

nationalistic discursive strategies, faced competition from two fronts: the Austro-German model and the US music-hall tradition.<sup>24</sup>

Across the early years of the twentieth century, one can trace in the French entertainment press an ongoing sense of crisis and national resentment that this most Parisian of forms was being bowdlerized by, for example, 'dancing girls and attractions which accommodate vibrantly coloured costume and decor'.<sup>25</sup> In an indignant piece published in *Comedia*, entitled 'Where is the French operetta going?', the case was made for the form being 'the surest criteria for the state of a collective soul'.<sup>26</sup> In this instance, the clear implication was that the state of the nation was weakening. Indeed, by the late 1920s and early 1930s there was an increasing tendency for live performance venues to refurbish themselves so as to be able to present a mixture of film and other attractions

Operetta, as it had then developed, was seen by some quarters of the critical press to be symptomatic of an un-Parisian modernity. Paul Achard, for example, wrote that Offenbach had been usurped: 'They have replaced the spirit of words with that of legs and girls', he complained.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, sound cinema – particularly that of Germany, Offenbach's native country – persisted in multi-language versions which demonstrated the technological benefits of film, such as improved sets, greater variety in decor, rhythmic editing patterns and an emphasis on performance. Productions such as *Le Congrès s'amuse*, with Lilian Harvey, re-established conventional operetta as a popular form which engineered references to the past in a contemporary idiom. As Vincendeau has suggested, because of the costs involved in such productions which necessitated large sets and casts of performers, Parisian audiences on the whole saw only French versions of these German films, such as *Le Bal* (Wilhelm Thiele, 1931).<sup>28</sup> The popularity of these films also has to be seen against the competition from large-budget American musical productions such as *42nd Street* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933).

It is interesting that at the same time as the return to Paris of the operetta via the German cinema, a revival of Offenbach's production took place in the Parisian theatre. Jane Marnac took the lead with Max Dearly at the Mogador in 1931 (the same year she starred in Augusto Genina's *Paris-Béguin*), and according to some reviews thus played a hand in the revival of Second Empire headwear on the streets of the French capital. Marnac went on to appear in a stage play based on the life of Hortense Schneider, and in the popular press her star persona was based at this time on her paradoxical ability to combine the appeal of the past with the frenetic world of modern-day France. Siodmak's film also attempts to live up to this paradox by incorporating the appeal of performers such as Max Dearly and Marcelle Praince, who were intimately associated with contemporary aspects of Parisian pleasure and could thus straddle the worlds of Paris in 1900 and in 1935. The two actors had worked

together previously in theatre and vaudeville, and in the same year as the film they were to be seen at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens in *Les Popinod*. While Dearly also specialized in comedies of Parisian manners (he had created the notorious *valse chaloupée* with Mistinguett), Praince had made her name as a 'Parisienne' in boulevard roles. Thus Siodmak's version of *La Vie Parisienne* is a production which contains multiple histories. It is a film made by a German, financed by Americans and set in Paris with a Parisian cast. It is the work of an emigre on his way to Hollywood, but it makes explicit reference to Parisian entertainment such as the 'French Can-Can'. Finally, it looks back to a distinctively French genre which had evolved to include Viennese and American-influenced off-shoots, and had been recently reborn in Germany, only to be re-exported back to Paris to see off American competition.

*La Vie Parisienne* offers not just a sense of hybridity in terms of its production history and consequent place in Parisian entertainment. By looking at the film's formal workings we can also discern a sense of journeying between the practices and values of more than one place and time. It is appropriate, therefore, that a key instance takes place in the intermediary space of the international hotel, with its associations of 'being in transit'. After a farcical sequence involving Georges and Helenita and mistaken bedrooms, which could have come from a Claudette Colbert vehicle, Jacques has returned to his proper quarters. He sees Helenita through the net curtain of his room, gazing out across the city from her balcony. In his article on the work of the emigres in France, Thomas Elsaesser suggests that the German cinematic inheritance of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* might be 'the importance given to objects (their texture, their geometrical lines) divorced from social uses and contexts, in order to bring out some vivid but unexpected qualities of abstraction and design'.<sup>29</sup>

We can see an aspect of this in the way that a recurring visual trope of the film is how characters are seen through the separating surface of a screen or curtain. In *Le Grand Noir* nightclub, for example, we see the arrival of Jacques and Simone (Germaine Aussey) – Lianne's successor at *La Vie Parisienne* – by means of a camera track in front of a dividing black chiffon curtain. The film continues to appropriate what might loosely be called a 'Germanic' *mise-en-scène* by developing the motif of spatial separation in the way Jacques appears to join Helenita. However, *mise-en-scène* does more than serve an empty formalistic argument, it also works to distinguish space (and light) in gendered terms, and thus it separates not just bodies but ways of seeing the city. Jacques tiptoes out to the balcony when there is a repeat of the previous shot that seems to confirm that he has joined her screen right. The film then cuts to a dramatic overhead shot which realigns our spatial perception and reveals that although the couple occupy a similar plane horizontally they are in fact separated, because Helenita's balcony is

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Elsaesser 'The German emigres in Paris during the 1930s: pathos and leavetaking', *Sight and Sound* vol. 53 no. 4 (1984) p. 282.

foregrounded in a diagonal relationship to Jacques's. A closer shot further emphasizes the distinctive geometry of the hotel architecture and underscores the spatial relationship of the couple. Elsaesser has also argued that in the emigre cinema 'light and lighting (its intensity or distribution across the frame) becomes, through the precise outline it throws on objects, almost a substitute for editing'.<sup>30</sup> This can be recognized by the way in which the characters are subsequently pictured

Having established the lack of equilibrium between the two people, the film then goes on to demonstrate a distinctive example of how, in this instance, the Parisian male privilege to look at women as objects (amplified in a different register by Don Ramiro's philanderings) can be underlined by cinematic style. The mythical component of light and somewhat frivolous Parisian (male) pleasure indicated in the preceding farce is here given a darker hue. A very diffuse light source to the rear of Jacques reduces him to a near silhouette, with only the left-hand side of his facial features illuminated by a strong side light. Helenita is more visibly lit, but strong light contrasts make her appearance to the right of the frame equally distinctive and spatially at odds with the figure which occupies the rear left of the image. A cut to a powerful medium closeup of the shadowed facial features of Jacques means that only the contours of the left edge of his physiognomy are apparent. He is smoking, and as he slowly raises his hand and draws on his cigarette the features of his face, which is gazing intently rightwards, are softly but dramatically illuminated. When he lowers his hand, the shadow of the initial shot returns. If the masculine gaze is coded as dark, the look of his obviously eroticized attention is coded with a profusion of particular whiteness. In the subsequent shot, Helenita is shown looking down at the street with the details of her hair and the luxuriant, fair-toned wrap around her shoulders clarified by a light source above her body.

Now comes the rub; for Helenita, it is shown, also has her own active relationship to the city. In this sense, *her* Paris of 1936 is a different place than the city her grandfather once knew and maintains still exists. According to the boundaries of the myth of light Paris, her relationship to the city is pictured in terms of a blurring between musical performance and 'real life'. In a subsequent point-of-view shot in the balcony scene we see that the object of her attention is a group of swirling, singing figures who emerge from the shadows of the street, screen right. A medium closeup tracking shot then follows of the musical ensemble who are temporarily halted by the outstretched arm of a figure of authority. Because this is Paris they are, of course, allowed to continue performing and they go on their way into the rear left-hand shadows of the screen. *La Vie Parisienne* is thus part of the life of the street as well as the stage. When we return to the face of the granddaughter the direction of her gaze is

now rightwards, which confirms that all we have seen has been through her eyes. Crucially, what follows is an exact duplication of the image of Jacques, which enables the filmic spectator to understand that the relationship between the performance on the street and the female protagonist has excluded the male. Later in the film, when the romance between the couple has blossomed, the two are seated together and a similar exchange of feeling between city dweller and city performer takes place, this time at a specifically coded site of entertainment – the nightclub. Because of Jacques's impecunious state he is forced to tell her that he is leaving her, but the way he puts it is that he is leaving *Paris*. 'It is good-bye to walking in the Bois every morning, strolling around museums without looking at anything', he says. As the music strikes up for another song, he moves closer. She motions him to be quiet and turns away from him, her gaze screen left is distracted by the anticipation of another performance by the *chanteuse* we have seen previously. This is *her* version of the city, and it is the profoundly emotional power of the sung version of city-based feeling that ultimately unites the lovers on screen. That this is guided by the seeming interrelationship of subjectivities between the singer and female audience member marks the moment as distinctive. The granddaughter turns back to look at Jacques. 'I love you', he says. Simultaneously, the song actually begins and the camera slowly glides closer to the couple. Her eyes move down and then she turns again to look at the *chanteuse*. We cut to a shot of the *chanteuse*, centre stage to match her gaze. The momentum of the feeling in the musical performance takes over, and in the following shots the granddaughter rises from the table and leads her lover to the dance floor where she begins to sing the song to Jacques. It is as if, enabled by this moment, she can sing Paris back to him.

It has been suggested by Elsaesser that the emigre films made in France during the 1930s produced a 'sense of unease and disorientation' that resulted from a disjuncture between this cinema of charged mise-en-scene and specifically French traditions of performance.<sup>31</sup> He claims, as does Vincendeau,<sup>32</sup> that 'trained mainly in the theatre or coming from the music-hall revue and the Paris cabaret, the French actor [brought] to a role not only the carefully distilled observation of social types and the body language of an immediately recognisable milieu, but the sense of an established rapport with an audience'.<sup>33</sup> Elsaesser's implication is that this performance tradition worked against the visual style of the emigre filmmaker in which 'the decor and the objects become the mirror and repository of reaction and response'.<sup>34</sup> In the case of the emigre Parisian musical, this case appears to collapse for two reasons. Firstly, if one looks at other French film versions of popular operettas such as *Mam'zelle Nitouche* (Marc Allégret, 1931)<sup>35</sup> and *Chacun sa chance* (Max Steinhoff/René Pujol, 1930), there is

31 Ibid. p. 283

32 Ginette Vincendeau, 'Les Portes ouvertes seulement a contrecourer: Les cineastes allemands en France pendant les annees trente', *Positif* no. 323 (January 1988) p. 49.

33 Elsaesser, 'The German émigrés in Paris' p. 283.

34 Ibid.

35 Shot in a contemporaneous German language version called *Mamsell Nitouche* by Carl Lamac. The original operetta with librettos by Meilhac and Millaud and music by Herve was a huge national success in the early years of the Third Republic.

inherent in the diegesis and consequent visual style an emphasis on visual doubling, illusion and play. It was part of the form of the genre. The second way in which the emigre musical actually fitted in with the French norm was by showcasing a meaningful hybridity in terms of performance. Instead of disrupting the 'established rapport with an audience', Siodmak's mise-en-scene actively complemented the idea of disparity already present in the use of stars. As Vincendeau suggests, part of the rapport Parisian audiences of the era had with the performers on screen was the ability to recognize the range of generic acting registers that each group of actors was using.<sup>36</sup> The disjuncture between the extravagant comic performance of Max Dearly and the mild matinee manner of Georges Rigaud in *La Vie Parisienne*, for example, serves to enhance the utopian aspect of the film's narrative which finally reconciles the past and present versions of Paris. Indeed, the mythical world of the *La Vie Parisienne*, that both Dearly and Don Ramiro stand for, can only really be made sense of in the present, through the contrast with the more modern-day, less theatrical and perhaps 'American' mode of being that Rigaud represents.

Elsaesser's argument 'that a mode of divided perception, and awareness of a double focus in narrative and representation, is one of the principles that the German cinema of the late Weimar period seems to have carried into exile'<sup>37</sup> does make sense in the film, but only if one applies it to the deliberate division in the way that the city is pictured. We can see this division in a key number in the film, involving Georges and Don Ramiro, which explores the intermingling of reality and spectacle and, in turn, the intermingling of past and present. The sequence begins in the transitory space of the contemporary hotel which, as we have previously seen, is depicted using a modernist, linear design scheme. The two men have returned with Helenita after a night out on the town. After leaving his female charge in the hotel bedroom, Don Ramiro takes Jacques by the arm and suggests more entertainment 'Aaah to return to Paris!', he declares. The camera tracks the two men as they move down the corridor. It stops and the men exit the image screen left. There is a rapid wipe-cut to the nightclub, and the two reappear with their arms linked, as if by magic, screen right from behind a pillar. It is as though they have transcended time and space, which in a sense they have, since the sophisticated luxury of the nightclub's ambience and entertainment promises a world embedded in a sense of the city far removed from the exclusive geometric features of the facade of the modern hotel.<sup>38</sup> As Don Ramiro moves his body across the differing social spaces of the hotel and the nightclub, the past version of Paris which he embodies is visualized coming back to life. What is interesting is how the returnee, dressed for the part in top hat and tails, commands the space of the venue. Modern-day Jacques can only look on passively. As the camera moves with Don Ramiro

<sup>36</sup> Vincendeau 'Les Portes ouvertes seulement à contrecœur' p. 49

<sup>37</sup> Elsaesser 'The German emigres in Paris' p. 280

<sup>38</sup> This 'magical' shift in space and time across the city might be a distinctive feature of the emigre picturing of the capital. In *La Crise est finie* (Robert Siodmak 1934) Marcel (Albert Préjean) and Nicole (Danielle Darrieux) suddenly find themselves looking in front of a shop window following a previous shot of Marcel pointing off stage. Salt also argues that jump cuts were frequently used by Ophüls in the mid 1930s. See Barry Salt 'From Caligari to who? Sight and Sound' vol. 48 no. 2 (1979) p. 217



across the floor and up the stairs, he gesticulates and dances as if he is in control of the spectacle. The film makes clear here, as it does in other instances across the narrative, that it is only largely through the invention and exuberance of music and performance that the past can be actively remembered. Don Ramiro seems to embrace the world around him, and through his constant motion space is continuously revealed to the spectator. He continues to dance and parade himself on reaching the top of the stairway, and a trail of amused, mainly female, participants are led around the contours of a bar in front of which he comes to a halt. This emphasis on circularity (the antithesis of the hotel's modernist rectilinearity) is reinforced in Colombier's extravagantly swirling decor. In a medium closeup he is pictured singing 'Paris, Paris, Paris, Paris', a glass and bottle of champagne in respective hands. We cut to a sudden overhead view of the action from which Don Ramiro can be seen with arms outstretched, overlooking the stage-like space below on the ground floor. On the final 'Paris', the stage figures begin to move and the 'show' begins as if, through his agency, past Paris has been brought into the present.

By the 1930s, with the population of the intra-mural city stabilized at around three million, and the subsequent rapid growth in the rim of suburban development encouraged by the development of tramlines and rail networks, Parisians were beginning to make use of the advent of paid holidays to view non-urban France. But the fact remains that representations of the city and the incorporation of the world of urban entertainment remained enormously popular for the filmgoing public of the Paris region. These representations, as we have seen, involved journeys of their own, both on the part of protagonists to and around the city, and in terms of travelling back to mythologies of the city generated during its period of most rapid growth, the nineteenth century. This article has taken the notion of journeying, foregrounded by the real experiences of the emigres, and linked it to a consideration of light and Paris in a number of ways.

Firstly, I have dealt with the notion of the city as a destination or place to be viewed which is in itself spectacular. I have linked the idea of particular viewing practices stemming from Hausmannization with the idea, from that period, of Paris being partly defined both against the world and within the world, to suggest that the emigre picturing of the capital fitted in with the conventions of the spectacle of the City of Light. Inherent in the notion of the City of Light was the development of spectacular entertainment, which equated an abundance of physical light with the display of a lightness of spirit and gaiety. Despite Siodmak's pronouncement that he hated 'operetta and vaudeville because they represent hollowness, flashiness and

artificiality',<sup>39</sup> during his stay in Paris he directed the musical film *La Vie Parisienne*, which relied substantially on an integration of cinematic technique and this popular French theatrical form. The film blurs the relationship between real Paris and staged or imagined Paris, and this has led me to consider, in more detail, the question of light in relationship to specific mythologies of popular Parisian pleasure. *La Vie Parisienne*, through its casting of key performers from live and recorded city entertainment, maintains what I have called 'the historically calibrated collusion between public and personnel' in linking the bodies of stars with the body of the city. Further, the contours of this site are marked by differences of class and gender. *La Vie Parisienne* colludes with a continuity of cultural representation by blurring the class location and sexuality of the *demi-mondaine*. Lianne's place within a set of historical mythologies concerning the city is the key to the settling of a number of instabilities the film proposes.

It is true to say, however, that the film remains a fascinating example of a historically specific kind of hybridity. It allows one to make several observations about the mobile relationship between the city-based popular entertainments of the cinema and theatre within a wider discourse which concerns inter-city travel between Berlin and Paris that has a significance for film finance, personnel and technology. The film thus also posits questions about the place of Paris in relation to the concept of a national cinema. The emigre films of the 1930s were multinational productions which had an eye on an international market, but they were also hybrid in the sense that they looked simultaneously backwards and forwards in relation to the present. Paris became the staging post for this set of intercultural journeys. The film's hybrid *mise-en-scene* was, therefore, far from a hollow exercise in style. It colluded with established notions of the light tradition of Parisian representation and demonstrated different ways of viewing the city. It disassociated itself from a sense of unease by reiterating the existing aspects of filmic illusion with the play and hybridity of performance in the French film operetta. If a sense of divided perception remains in the way the spaces of the city were variously pictured, perhaps this can be only expected. As refugees on a journey from an oppressive political regime, and faced with a far from embracing welcome from a fractured French film industry, Robert Siodmak and his fellow emigres were literally divided in themselves.

I would like to thank Ginette Vincendeau for her advice and support regarding an earlier draft of this article.

# Time, space and vision: Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*

KRISTI WILSON

*What must not be conceived of is a seer for whom the background  
is eventful, dramatic, compelling*  
Marilyn Frye<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Frye *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1983) p. 170

In her 1993 book, *Feminism and Geography*, Gillian Rose draws from a variety of interdisciplinary feminist arguments (from poststructuralist theory, psychoanalysis and feminist film theory) to consider the ways in which the seemingly scientific discipline of geography demands that its participants occupy a masculinist subject position. She asks her readers to resist the notion that historically and geographically specific space can be seen as transparent, and challenges them to reflect upon the ways in which the nature of space is paradoxical.

I want to end by asking for a geography that acknowledges that the grounds of its knowledge are unstable, shifting, uncertain and, above all, contested. Space itself – and landscape and place likewise – far from being firm foundations for disciplinary expertise and power, are insecure, precarious and fluctuating. They are destabilized both by the internal contradictions of the geographical desire to know and by the resistance of the marginalized victims of that desire. And other possibilities, other sorts of geographies, with different compulsions, desires and effects, complement and contest each other. This chapter has tried to describe just one of them. There are many more.<sup>2</sup>

This paper is a response to Rose's call for alternative geographies.

<sup>2</sup> Gillian Rose *Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) p. 160

Accordingly, I explore the implications of a consideration of geographical and spatial politics in film for the practice of feminist film criticism. I examine the ways in which Nicolas Roeg's cinematic techniques interrogate dominant discourses of vision, power, knowledge and spatial formations, and point towards what I will call a paradoxical geography of failed masculinity at play in his work. I am particularly interested in his 1973 film *Don't Look Now*, the protagonist of which is a theoretician of space and architecture. While a thorough consideration of feminist geography and feminist film theory will follow from a close reading of the film, I turn first to questions of desire as they pertain to feminist film theory and Roeg's career as a director.

Nicolas Roeg has long been recognized as an art-house film director for whom box-office success has proved difficult. Unfortunately for those interested in his movies, much of the existent critical work on Roeg is invested in attributing the commercially unappealing qualities of his films to his own childhood struggle with a mysterious mental illness, or in focusing on certain obsessive, narcissistic qualities that characterize his personality and prevent him from collaborating with others as a director. By contrast, Joseph Lanza maintains that Roeg has been a commercial director all along, and cites Roeg's *Performance* (1970), *Don't Look Now* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) which, in his opinion, parallel box-office hits such as *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) and *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977).<sup>3</sup> The problem with the public reception of Roeg's films, according to Lanza, lies not in audience questions about Roeg's artistic integrity, but in the failure of audiences to understand the messages of his films. The question of audience reception and whether moviegoers have been unable or *unwilling* to find redeeming or pleasurable qualities in the films of Nicolas Roeg is an important one, astutely addressed by Teresa de Lauretis in her article, 'Now and nowhere. Roeg's *Bad Timing*', by far the most theoretically intriguing work on Roeg to be found.<sup>4</sup> De Lauretis contextualizes Roeg's filmic techniques historically in terms of what she considers to be a type of cinematic resistance emerging from his relentless interrogation of vision, power and knowledge. According to de Lauretis, this form of rigorous cinematic questioning has consistently eclipsed his chances for box-office success.

Employing a Foucauldian 'microanalytics', de Lauretis evaluates the presence of investments and counterinvestments to the power network in *Bad Timing* (1979), which might have important implications for feminist film criticism. Foucault's method of historical analysis posits an extension of the notion of 'technology' to include 'a set of regulated procedures, mechanisms and techniques of reality-control, deployed by power . . . [encompassing] the production of social subjects, practices and knowledges'.<sup>5</sup> This

3 Joseph Lanza *Fragile Geometry: the Films 'Philosophy' and 'Misadventures' of Nicolas Roeg* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1989) p. 36

4 Teresa de Lauretis 'Now and nowhere: Roeg's *Bad Timing*' *Discourse* 5 (1987) pp. 33-7

5 Ibid. p. 84

paradigm helps to shift questions of cinema away from notions of 'art', the expression of an individual director's creativity, or a form of documentation, towards questions that expose the very boundaries of notions of cinema as a self-contained system. De Lauretis is particularly concerned with the ideological effects sought after and/or produced in spectatorship by cinematic discourse. With Foucault's expanded definition of technology, then, cinema shifts from being viewed solely as an art form to being understood as a practical and social field. According to him, power and resistances are mutually interdependent and found everywhere in the same network. Individuals and groups are said to take on variable positions, which sometimes imply resistance, in a continually shifting, mobile system of relations. De Lauretis asks us to be wary of the totality of this 'almost too optimistic vision of an unlimited political semiosis', lest we lose sight of the importance of being able to identify and articulate points of resistance in the power network, as she tries to do from a feminist standpoint in her analysis of *Bad Timing*.<sup>6</sup>

6 Ibid p. 86

According to de Lauretis, there is a type of radical difference that resists incorporation into the discourses of power, knowledge and vision operating in *Bad Timing*. This is exemplified by problematic representations of time which undercut spectator identification via visual manipulation and a jumbled sense of narrative. De Lauretis argues that the spectrum of Roeg's signature techniques – non-sequiturs in the dialogue, visual and aural divergence, unsynchronized sound, and montage images – calls attention to the construction of his films, creates a radically different sense of time and, as a result, points toward a resistant, unrepresentable form of feminine desire. Time is thus theorized as differentiated along gender lines. In *Bad Timing* there exists simultaneously the legal time of the detective's investigation of the female protagonist Milena's 'ravishment', the illegal time of her boyfriend's illicit sexual desire (both of these are forms of phallic desire) and Milena's time, which exists somehow outside of this power network:

the sequential, metonymic order of the investigation and the metaphoric register of obsessive repetition define the legal and illegal times of masculine, phallic desire. But a third possibility is posed in the film, questioning the first two: the possibility of a different temporality, another time of desire. 'What about my time', shouts Milena in a context where time stands for desire. 'what about now?'.<sup>7</sup>

7 Ibid p. 78

De Lauretis points out that the last question in the above quote is never answered in the film, indicating an articulation of the function of 'woman as the support of masculine desire and the odd term in the relations of power'.<sup>8</sup> Both Milena and Alex resist the power network in the Foucauldian sense: Milena resists Alex's patriarchal control and Alex refuses to confess his crime to the inspector

8 Ibid p. 99

However, only Alex ends up retaining power. There is no place or time for Milena's desire in the film. De Lauretis theorizes this absence of Milena's time for desire as an example of a weakness in Foucault's notion of freedom in 'bodies and pleasures'. Freedom is thus beneficial for some who resist and dangerous for others; Milena is sexually attacked and almost dies in the film. Real resistance, according to de Lauretis, can only come from 'the underside of discourse', a form of absolute negativity with respect to the power network.<sup>9</sup> This reading of *Bad Timing*, which highlights the ways in which Roeg draws attention to this odd term in the power structure by rupturing the temporal narrative, can be linked to de Lauretis's attempts to historicize desire in another essay, 'Desire in narrative'. For de Lauretis, there is in fact a 'time of desire', 'time stands for desire' and 'time is part of the unified trajectory of phallic desire'.<sup>10</sup> Feminine desire then, while it cannot be represented, must be sought somewhere between the conflicting representations of time and phallic desire in *Bad Timing*. In 'Desire in narrative', de Lauretis reinterprets Mulvey's assertion that 'sadism demands a story' to imply that 'story [narrative] demands sadism'.<sup>11</sup> Sadism is thus produced by the fact that the action which occurs within a linear narrative, in the journey from beginning to end, is to a great extent accomplished without the consent of women. Furthermore, women in narrative must consent to femininity, be seduced into consenting or, like the character of Milena in *Bad Timing*, pay a heavy price for not consenting. For de Lauretis, Roeg's film serves as an important intervention in the traditional structure of western narrative. It juxtaposes the female protagonist's refusal of consent with a disruption of the linear time of the narrative, accentuating the overall constructedness of her position within the 'real' time of the film and, by extension, introducing the question of the constructed nature of 'femininity' or 'femaleness' in general.

Critics such as Jay Clayton fault de Lauretis for failing to interrogate fully notions of desire in the wake of her efforts to historicize the female subject of narrative within the linear context of the Oedipal drama.<sup>12</sup> Clayton points out that there exists, in fact, no precise definition for the term 'desire' in contemporary criticism, and that desire 'designates no single idea or model of human behaviour'.<sup>13</sup> He takes issue with the idea that desire is a 'language that all men and women speak', indicating that there could be other theoretical representations of desire than the purely sexual, such as drives towards power, money or knowledge.<sup>14</sup> Others, like Teresa Ebert and Judith Williamson, consider the role of desire specifically in terms of feminist theory. They claim that many feminist paradigms which place ahistorical notions of sexual desire and difference at the seat of the social often displace existing forms of exploitation, centred around issues of class and race, in favour of utopian notions of pure difference.<sup>15</sup> According to Williamson, more

9 Ibid p 95

10 Ibid p 133

11 Teresa de Lauretis *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington IN Indiana University Press 1984) p 103

12 Jay Clayton 'Narrative and theories of desire' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 16 (1989) pp 33–53

13 Ibid p 35

14 Ibid p 33

15 See Teresa Ebert *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire, and Labor in Late Capitalism* (College Park MI University of Michigan Press 1996) and Judith Williamson *Woman is an island: femininity and colonization* in Tania Modleski (ed.) *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington IN Indiana University Press 1986)

interesting than what images of 'femininity' in mass culture reveal, is what they conceal. She concedes that gendered sexual desire is important, but that in academic circles

the focus seems to have gone hand in hand with neglect of other issues. For example, speech and writing have as much to do with class as with 'desire'. But sexuality and 'desire' are special to us *all*, and herein lies their appeal as the 'hot' topics of the moment<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Williamson 'Woman is an island' p. 103

While the above is a rather extreme dismissal of academic work on sexuality, the point that narrative theories which focus solely on 'desire' seem to be complicit with the construction of raceless, classless gendered subjects is well taken. It appears, then, that de Lauretis's argument, which assumes that there exists a form of resistant feminine desire not representable in cinematic imagery (yet conceivable in the minds of 'women' who watch movies), might actually contribute to a simple but potentially dangerous theoretical binary that minimizes or contains ethnic and/or class differences between women. According to Williamson, this containment of difference through a general discourse of uniquely *feminine* desire provides an economic function which works to further the cause of the capitalist power network. Referring especially to the entertainment industry, Williamson writes.

Thus, while we seem to have little choice over, for example, nuclear weapons, we tend to think of ourselves as having freedom or happiness inasmuch as these qualities are manifested in our personal lives, the part of life represented by femininity. And the sphere which is supposedly most different from the capitalist system is crucial to it, both economically and in producing its meanings. The 'natural' phenomena of the family and sexuality throw back an image of a 'natural' economy, while the economy penetrates and indeed constructs these 'natural' and 'personal' areas, liberally offering us our own bodies as sites of difference.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 106

However, more recent work by de Lauretis indicates that she is not, in fact, satisfied with paradoxically conservative notions of 'woman', and is quite willing to provide a framework which can be employed as a critique of her own earlier notions about feminine desire. Situating herself in an evolving academic movement that is critical of 'the history of feminism – with its compromises, its racial arrogance, its conceptual and ideological blind spots' – in 'Eccentric subjects, feminist theory and historical consciousness' de Lauretis describes what she considers to be a 'third movement' in feminist theory; one that aims at moving beyond theories couched in 'the terms of liberal pluralism, socialist humanism, and aesthetic modernism', which remain 'un-self-consciously complicit in their racism, colonialism,

18 Teresa de Lauretis 'Eccentric subjects: feminist theory and historical consciousness' in de Lauretis (ed.) *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: IN: Indiana University Press, 1984) pp. 118–132

and heterosexism'.<sup>18</sup> She calls for a reconceptualization and elaboration of new terms for feminist theory which challenge the concept of a unified female subject based upon the following considerations

(1) a reconceptualization of the subject as shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference; (2) a rethinking of the relations between forms of oppression and modes of formal understanding – of doing theory; (3) an emerging redefinition of marginality as location, of identity as dis-identification, and (4) the hypothesis of self-displacement as the term of a movement that is concurrently social and subjective, internal and external, indeed political and personal.<sup>19</sup>

19 Ibid. p. 116

It is my view that recent work in feminist geographical theory that deals specifically with issues pertaining to marginality, location and dislocation (like those outlined above), can help us to uncover a new set of considerations for feminist film theory. Having pointed towards certain paradoxes and concerns within feminist film theory, I will now focus on a reading of Roeg's film, *Don't Look Now*

*Don't Look Now* shares many stylistic qualities with *Bad Timing* and, like *Bad Timing*, was slated to be a crossover film designed to propel the director into mainstream cinema. I will contribute to recent attempts at repositioning theories of sexual desire historically and in turn, complicate the privileged status of these theories within film theory by participating in emerging discourses on urban landscapes and the cinema which demonstrate that cinematic representations of gender and social contradiction do not have to point primarily to sexual desire to qualify as topics of interest for feminist film studies.

A possible connection between Nicolas Roeg's reluctance to align his films with traditional 'ways of seeing', his tendency to focus on the problematic relationships between people and geographical landscapes and new feminist critiques of geographical theory is intriguing, and warrants an exploration of which characteristics of these narratives proved so distasteful to audiences.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, I am reminded of the recent success of the 1996 film adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's 1992 novel, *The English Patient*. Director Anthony Minghella takes quite a few liberties with the novel's critical stance toward the masculinist, imperialist tendencies of geographical exploration, providing instead, a traditional and nostalgic portrayal of a few members of the British Royal Geography Society framed as a romance narrative. In *The English Patient*, discourses of masculine expertise and imperial geographical domination are dependent upon notions of feminine beauty and the 'natural', in this case a foreign landscape. In the beginning of the film, the protagonist is advised by an old man in the desert to map his way to the cave he searches for by tracing the curve of a

20 See *Walkabout* (1971) and *Castaway* (1987)



woman's back in the mountain ridge. Accordingly, the geographer-hero's simultaneous quest for a beautiful woman and secret knowledge about the land begins. In order to comprehend the comforting and familiar characteristics which make a film like *The English Patient* – unlike *Don't Look Now* – so intensely pleasurable for the audience, we must look into some of the effects that longstanding masculinist traditions of spatial organization have had on western cultural production.

Nicolas Roeg's film adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's modern gothic short story of the same name, is the tale of an English/American couple, John and Laura Baxter, who travel to Venice, on a combined work/pleasure trip, in an effort to reinvigorate their marriage after the recent death of their young daughter, Christine. While the short story begins with the couple already in Venice, speculating on the gender and sexuality of two older female tourists in a restaurant (the Scottish 'sisters'), Roeg's film opens in the countryside of England with the camera moving precariously over what will soon become a dangerous landscape. The glitter of a false reality reflected in the Baxter's landscape is literally the first image we see, in the form of shiny raindrops falling on the pond in which Christine will drown. There is a quick cut to what we will only later realize is the window of the Baxter's future hotel room in Venice, and then we are back in the present, minutes after the rain storm. Aside from this temporal glitch in the narrative, the strangeness of the Baxter's farm landscape is accentuated by the sharply contrasting climates of England and Venice: in Venice the sun is glaring through the windows, while in England the rain is just letting up. The pastoral images in the Baxters' backyard create a hyperreal atmosphere: a white horse gallops leisurely across a green field; a young girl in a red raincoat pushes a wheelbarrow towards a forest while her older brother rides his bike through the trees and leaves. The girl is playing with what, at first glance, looks like a Barbie doll, but on closer inspection is actually a male action doll dressed in fatigues and a helmet (equipped with gas-mask) from the waist up, and a shiny skirt and combat boots from the waist down. This uncanny image of femininity is an early indication that traditional narratives of masculinity, and gender roles in general, will be complicated in the film.

Inside their large English farmhouse, John and Laura relax comfortably by the fire. The Baxters appear to be the embodiment of twentieth-century, white, upper-middle-class domesticity. However, this 'illusory coherence' of the family in their safely isolated home environment (complete with protected boundaries), will soon be exposed. The Baxter's farmhouse is just one of the many ways in which class is articulated in *Don't Look Now*. As a counterpoint, there is also an ongoing trope of staring, voiceless, country people in the narrative, which includes the Scottish sisters as well as the local

Venetians. Towards the beginning of the film, Laura Baxter meets the sisters in a restaurant bathroom in Venice. One of the sisters excuses the two of them for staring at her: 'I hope you don't think us rude . . . staring at you out there. We're active starers, the two of us. It comes from living in the country, you know. Country people always stare.' These lines are accompanied by two shots of a silent ladies-room attendant seated in the background. The attendant appears once in her own shot and another time in the bathroom mirror. Given that this trope, or chorus, of staring, voiceless people in the background and margins of John's experience is not found in the short story and is purely a cinematic invention of Roeg's, I disagree with Lanza's assertion that Roeg is more interested in portraying characters with plenty of money than the working class.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Lanza: *Fragile Geometry* p. 14

Although the Baxter's home and its surrounding landscape is not exactly haunted in a traditionally gothic manner, every aspect of John's illusory success as a white male professional is haunted by marginal forces which threaten to intrude upon his ability to work and think rationally. Although he is a land surveyor, architect and theoretician of space (in the film we are shown that he is the author of a book entitled, *Beyond the Fragile Geometry of Space*), he has no sense of the landscape which surrounds his own home. Even before the couple arrive in Venice, we see that John has little or no control over his current project to restore an old Venetian church. His inability to perceive what is behind the 'fragile geometry' of the space in which he, at least initially, feels comfortable is the key to his self-propelled downfall.

From the opening shots of the film, then, landscape, class and power inform the narrative. With this in mind, an interesting starting point for a synthesis of film studies and geography is provided by Rose's work. In her critique, she describes the hegemonic tendencies of western academic geographical knowledge. Rose borrows Michèle Le Doeuff's term, *masculinist*, to refer to a particular type of academic work which professes its exhaustive and comprehensive qualities, but fails to take such basic issues as gender, race, class and sexuality into the fold of its mainstream focus.<sup>22</sup> In chapter five of her book, 'Looking at landscape: the uneasy pleasures of power', she examines the geographer's gaze and the process of fieldwork in cultural geography, and makes important links between feminist geographical practices and feminist theories of the visual.

<sup>22</sup> This is certainly not to say that Rose overlooks the many instances of valuable feminist geographical work on and by women.

Landscape, in the process of fieldwork, is described by Rose as the scene upon which the geographer gazes in the quest to decipher the 'relation between the natural environment and human society, or, to rephrase, between Nature and Culture'.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on the work of new cultural geographers who take their cues from a tradition of Marxist humanist thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson and John Berger, Rose explores some of the material and symbolic ways in which society is produced and

<sup>23</sup> Rose: *Feminism and Geography* p. 86

reproduced around the concept of landscape. She argues that while important work has been done which unmask the fieldworker's position as complicit with a form of visual ideology that demonstrates the unequal social relations between the geographer and their environment, issues pertaining to gender and sexuality have been largely omitted from these studies. Beginning with feminist interpretations of nineteenth-century landscape paintings in North America and Europe, which take into account economic and political unrest directly related to colonial explorations during that period, Rose makes an important connection between fieldwork, the development of the discipline of geography, and new ways of visually encoding women as representative of nature in art. She thus attempts to narrow the gap between aesthetic representation and lived spatio-temporal experience. Drawing from John Berger's account of the commodification of art and sex in western fine art, and feminist arguments which contend that the genre of the female nude painting responds specifically to the heterosexual fantasies of the masculine artist and patron, Rose describes what she sees as unspoken masculinist pleasures inherent in the discipline of geography.<sup>24</sup> The idea of a visual ideology behind the geographer's gaze is fused with the longstanding tradition in geographical discourse to speak stereotypically about the beauty of landscape and nature in terms of the female body. Rose argues that geographers feel certain pleasures when studying (looking at) landscape which are masked by the discipline's scientism.

Central to any further understanding of the pleasure that geographers feel, but fail to acknowledge, when looking at a landscape is E.F. Keller's and C.R. Grontkowski's work on the gaze of the scientist and masculinist rationality.<sup>25</sup> Keller and Grontkowski provide a genealogy of the tendency in western scientific thought to associate knowledge with vision, which begins with Plato and becomes solidified in scientific discourse in the seventeenth century. The complete disembodiment of rational knowledge is credited to Descartes' separation of the intellectual 'I' from the seeing 'eye'. Rose suggests that the geographer is caught between the roles of 'sensitive artist' and the 'objective scientist' in their approach to fieldwork.<sup>26</sup> According to Rose, unspoken pleasures locate the scientific fieldworker in a position similar to that of a nineteenth-century property owner, gazing at the land as he would a painting of a 'feminine body which requires interpreting by the cultured knowledgeable look'.<sup>27</sup> What should be emphasized in this schema is not simply the notion of pleasure as heterosexual desire, but the fact that the role of the white, heterosexual, male fieldworker is permitted certain feelings of pleasure in the knowledge that he is the agent of control with respect to the spatial organization and representation of geographical landscapes, including the discursive conflation of the female body with landscape.

<sup>24</sup> Rose cites C.M. Armstrong 'Edgar Degas and the representation of the female body' in S.R. Suleiman (ed.) *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986) pp. 223–42, 237.

<sup>25</sup> E.F. Keller and C.R. Grontkowski 'The mind's eye' in S. Harding and M.B. Hintikka (eds) *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983) pp. 201–24.

<sup>26</sup> Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 97.

In the opening sequence of *Don't Look Now*, just before his daughter drowns, John is shown studying slides of Venetian churches from the detached, decontextualized, technologically advanced environment of his home/work space in England. From a comfortable non-urban setting, John gazes upon the urban space he is attempting to restore from afar. Right away, he is presented in his role as a professional manipulator of space and can be easily aligned ideologically with Rose's idea of the all-seeing, all-knowing fieldworker/geographer. This representation is enhanced by numerous closeups of John's face concentrating on the slide images. At one point, intrigued by a marginal figure in one of the slides (Christine's visual double, who will turn out to be the serial killer), John is not satisfied with the view his large screen provides, and scrutinizes the slide even more closely with the help of a powerful magnifying glass. Though he repositions himself to get a closer look – so that he is now gazing directly down upon the image – the figure of the dwarf in the slide will forever escape him. However, though John seems to be endowed technologically with 'the position of mastery of the urban spectacle and of the objects contained within it', he ultimately fails, as does the film.<sup>28</sup> Ironically, at a later point in the narrative, John reassures his wife that 'seeing is believing' when, unconvinced by her claims to be in complete mental health, he sees that she (at least) *looks* normal.

John is all-seeing in a non-professional capacity as well, he is endowed with clairvoyant powers which he tries unsuccessfully to suppress throughout his brief stay in Venice. Consequently, he is plagued with strange visions of the future which he cannot understand and which eventually have a direct effect upon his ability to 'cognitively map' his way around. Thus, when he actually leaves his home, John's university training and expertise are useless to him, as the everyday geographical space of Venice proves to be psychically, spatially and temporally menacing.

As Teresa De Lauretis has pointed out with respect to *Bad Timing*, montage plays a very important role in Roeg's work, establishing the temporal space of many of his films as somewhere between the present, future and past. Roeg's techniques for establishing a type of cinematic resistance to dominant narrative practices, emphasize a questioning of discourses of vision, power, knowledge and – at least in the case of *Don't Look Now*, *Walkabout* and *Castaway* – geographical space. Interestingly, more than one British film critic reads *Don't Look Now* in conjunction with two of Roeg's other films, *Walkabout* and *Performance*, as part of a 'trilogy querying the whole conception of civilization'.<sup>29</sup> Again, in relation to the work of feminist film theorists such as Elisabeth Mahoney, whose readings of movies attempt to counteract theoretical 'illusions of a depoliticized "soft" postmodern landscape [and] to recover spatial configurations from their conventional place somewhere outside of, or beyond,

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 133. Also cited in Elisabeth Mahoney 'The people in parentheses: space under pressure in the post-modern city' in David B. Clarke (ed.) *The Cinematic City* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Mark Sanderson *Don't Look Now* (London: British Film Institute, 1994) p. 22.

linear, hierarchical, ideological, and narrative structures'.<sup>30</sup> I would suggest that Roeg's film and, in particular, the character John provide an interesting textual link between theory and practice.

*Don't Look Now* can be seen as a very deliberate attempt on the part of Roeg to call attention to the political nature of all landscapes. His character, John, manipulates space within the narrative in a way that invites and almost prevents one from turning away from the ideological implications of John's spatial 'expertise'. In a sense, the character brings the tools of spatial analysis to the viewer, aligning the film with Foucault's notion of a practical, social field.

On this score, Rose's work also provides a necessary theoretical connection between real geographical configurations and practices and the narrative conventions of cinema by interpreting the geographer's pleasure in images of landscape with the help of feminist psychoanalytic theories of the gaze. Though she frames her discussion of this pleasure in terms of its dependence upon loss, lack, desire and sexual difference, Rose makes clear that she is aware of the fact that psychoanalysis as a whole, with its own implicit phallogocentric and heterosexist tendencies, is incapable of being a complete and satisfactory theoretical apparatus for women. Instead, she focuses upon the particular ways in which feminists have appropriated its tenets in their work on ideologies, the seen image and masculinist visual pleasure. From the work of a select group of feminist psychoanalytic theorists, we learn that the gaze, which takes pleasure in the realm of visual space, is eroticized through heterosexual desire, a process which is very often dependent upon the whiteness of the spectator. Laura Mulvey argues that the pleasure implicit in the gaze is voyeuristic and, when applied to Hollywood cinema, dangerously codified and eroticized into calculated, patriarchal, sexist representations.<sup>31</sup> However, Mulvey's account of the gaze and visual space as it lines up with heterosexuality has been attacked by Rose and many others for presupposing a biological as opposed to fictional character of identity and for failing to consider 'multiple gendered positions afforded by the gaze'.<sup>32</sup> While the idea of cinema spectatorship and its relationship to the cinematic gaze has a different history, and should not be compared literally to the geographer's gaze at landscapes, I would suggest that Rose's exploration of the masculinist politics of the discipline of geography paves the way for more complex interdisciplinary studies of how the politics of space, gender, class and race function within eroticized filmic space.<sup>33</sup>

Roeg's choice to deviate from Du Maurier's short story and make his protagonist, John, an expert on Venice and its architecture, cannot help but evoke the obvious 'paratextual' image of John Ruskin – draughtsman, art and architecture historian extraordinaire – known, among other things, for his enormous influence on English

31 See Jacqueline Rose *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986); Laura Mulvey *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); and Jane Gaines 'White privilege and looking relations: race and gender in feminist film theory', *Screen* vol. 29 no. 4 (1988) pp. 12–27.

32 Judith Halberstam *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995) p. 166. See also Juliet Mitchell 'Introduction I' in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne* (London: Macmillan, 1982); and Laura Mulvey's own reconsideration of her argument in 'Afterthoughts on "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema": inspired by *Duel in the Sun*' in Constance Penley (ed.) *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

33 See also Giuliana Bruno's study of the life and works of turn of the century Italian filmmaker Elvira Notari: *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> See Giuliana Bruno's use of the paratext in her work. Citing Gerard Genette, Bruno describes how a text is always hidden within another text and that consequently one is always performing a double reading. Ibid. p. 152

<sup>35</sup> Arnold Whittick quoting Ruskin from *The Stones of Venice* in Whittick (ed.) *Ruskin's Venice* (London: Leonard Hill Books, 1976) p. 14

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 3

<sup>37</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) p. 12

gothic literature and the way Venice is *seen* by tourists.<sup>34</sup> His canonical nineteenth-century book, *The Stones of Venice*, was the first (some scholars still consider it to be the best) modern work of scholarship on the art and architecture of Venice. Between 1851 and 1904, four editions, plus a traveller's and library edition, of Ruskin's book were published. Numerous paperback editions have appeared since 1904. Some scholars even trace the steady stream of tourism into Venice to the first publication of *The Stones of Venice*. In the traveller's edition of the book, Ruskin forever shaped the way Venice was consumed and remembered by tourists by sifting through the city's contents and selecting the most authentic and appropriate works of art for the traveller to take in: 'I have endeavoured to make the following index as useful as possible to the traveler, by indicating the objects which are really worth his study . . . the attention bestowed on second-rate works, in such a city as Venice, is not merely lost, but actually harmful – deadening the interest and confusing the memory with respect to those which it is a duty to enjoy, and a disgrace to forget.'<sup>35</sup> Aside from fabricating a way for tourists to experience Venice, Ruskin created a need for his expertise discursively by accentuating in his writings the chaotic nature of a city full of fine art and architecture, and yet bordering on decay due to a general state of ignorance amongst its inhabitants:

I found that the Venetian antiquaries were not agreed within a century as to the date of the building of the façades of the Ducal Palace, and that nothing was known of any other civil edifice of the early city, except that at some time or another it had been fitted up for somebody's reception. . . . Every date in question was determinable only by internal evidence, and it became necessary for me to examine not only every one of the older palaces, stone by stone, but every fragment throughout the city which afforded any clue to the formation of its styles. This I did as well as I could, and I believe there will be found, in the following pages, the only existing account of the details of early Venetian architecture on which dependence can be placed, as far as it goes.<sup>36</sup>

Edward Said's work on cultural forms of imperialism has made it easy for us to foreground Ruskin as an intriguing paratextual link between the figure of the fieldworker, and Roeg's protagonist with respect to his colonizing, scholarly expertise. According to Said, Ruskin's aesthetic theories and authority tend to be studied at the expense of their participation in the 'subjugation of inferior peoples and colonial territories'.<sup>37</sup> Implicit in my reading of the opening sequence of *Don't Look Now*, John Baxter's appearance in his Ruskin-esque role is confirmed by his studying and sketching images of Venetian architecture. A later jump-cut from the pond in which Christine drowned to a closeup of a construction worker in Venice drilling into an old cathedral under John's supervision, reveals him

as an expert on the city, pitted against the menacing role that water has played in its history. John is also shown in his hotel room studiously sketching landscapes and architectural details of buildings which resemble Ruskin's illustrations in *The Stones of Venice*. Thus, John Baxter's mission in Venice meshes with Ruskin's; he is there to rescue a city from, firstly, the water and then, secondly, its inhabitants, who appear to be incapable of caring for it.

Concerning Venice as a narrative site, I would like to suggest that Judith Halberstam's notion of a gothic economy, which 'constructs a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality and capital want to disavow [and which] complies with what we might call the logic of capitalism, a logic which rationalizes even the most supernatural of images into material images of capitalism itself', can also be considered in conjunction with the idea of Venice as a gothic landscape.<sup>38</sup> What better space in which to set a (perhaps *post*) modern gothic tale than the sinking city of Venice, an urban centre founded on ethnic diversity, collective thought and pre-capitalist surplus production, whose rich history has, according to Henri Lefebvre, been completely liquidated, or made monstrous, by the industry of modern tourism?<sup>39</sup> In a passage which locates the landscape of Venice ideologically somewhere between Rose's idea of a masculinist economy, in that the city exists to be looked at like a painting, and Halberstam's gothic economy of disavowal, Lefebvre inadvertently provides an interesting analogy between Rose's fieldworker and the tourist:

representations of space, which confuse matters precisely because they offer an already clarified picture, must be dispelled . . . A landscape also has the seductive power of all *pictures*, and this is especially true of an urban landscape – Venice, for example – that can impose itself immediately as a *work*.

Whence the archetypal touristic delusion of being a participant in such a work, and of understanding it completely, even though the tourist merely passes through a country or countryside and absorbs its image in quite a passive way. The work in its concrete reality, its products, and the productive activity involved are all thus obscured and indeed consigned to oblivion.<sup>40</sup>

Roeg's portrayal of the landscape of Venice in *Don't Look Now* is made especially unfamiliar to non-Venetians as he presents his audience with an urban touristic centre devoid of tourists. According to Lefebvre, mass migrations of tourists into urban or rustic locations represent an important, specifically modern phenomenon, space is consumed both literally and economically, which reinforces what he refers to as the modern world's liquidation of history. This process is facilitated by 'mirage effects', or the subject's delusional capacity to claim a landscape as his or her own. By filming in the dead of winter, during the off-season and in non-touristic areas of the city,

<sup>38</sup> Halberstam *Skin Shows* p. 102.

<sup>39</sup> See Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) pp. 122–3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 189.

Roeg has immediately complicated the notion of Venice as a prepackaged *work of art* to be enjoyed aesthetically or recreationally by tourists. Though her short story is set during the warmer, summer months, du Maurier is also acutely aware of Venice's qualities as a space to be consumed by tourists. Mockingly, she shows her protagonist pondering the 'real' landscape as if he were a 'native'.

The soft humidity of the evening, so pleasant to walk about in earlier, had turned to rain. The strolling tourists had melted away. This is what the inhabitants who live here see, he thought. This is the true life. Empty streets by night, and the dank stillness of a stagnant canal beneath shuttered houses. The rest is a bright façade put on for show, glittering by sunlight.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Daphne du Maurier *Don't Look Now* (New York: Doubleday 1971) p. 24

An interesting line of questioning regarding Roeg's film might be to explore what type of histories are allowed to emerge once the top layer of mirage effects have been removed. As we have seen, the concept of mirage (a *glittering* reflection of reality) functions on many different levels in *Don't Look Now*, not the least of which is Roeg's own interrogation of traditional Hollywood cinematic techniques.

Rose suggests that Marilyn Frye's ideas about phallocratic reality and relational identity are helpful in understanding the politics of geographical space. Frye's notion of a phallocratic reality consists of figures which move in the space of the foreground (presumably male), who are dependent upon an obscure background (the uneventful space of women) to the extent that nothing in it refers to the foreground, and vice versa. Frye suggests that we think of phallocratic reality in terms of a stage production in which the stagehands support the illusion of the actor's reality. Her paradigm thus lends itself quite well to an analysis of filmic representations of space. Frye's notions of a phallocratic reality are complemented by Lefebvre's assertion that, 'the space of a (social) order is hidden in the order of space'.<sup>42</sup> Roeg's film complicates this type of gendered foreground/background distinction at the onset of the action. The background in *Don't Look Now*, with respect to John's identity, consists of primary female characters (the Scottish sisters, Laura, Christine's ghost [indirectly], and Christine's mysterious Venetian double) as well as a silent chorus of male and female locals who seem to do nothing more than stare.

In the montage sequence at the beginning of the film, in which we have already seen John studying a particular slide and Laura reading by the fireplace at the moment when their daughter falls into the pond outside, a closeup of the slide reveals that a drop of blood-red liquid has begun to rise from the formerly two-dimensional background image (the result of a spilt drink) and seep onto John's desk.<sup>43</sup> This sequence provides a literal example of physical slippage between background and foreground, an example of gendered

<sup>42</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* p. 289

<sup>43</sup> According to Sanderson, the shape of the spilt liquid takes the form of a foetus and signifies a terrible evil that is born. I would add that the shape of the water has a geographical significance which once again reinforces the visual notion of menacing water: it seems to form the inverse of what has been mapped since the sixteenth century by cartographers as the established profile of the city, showing the lagoon interrupted by a threatening river which resembles a fish with an "S" shaped back. See Guido Zucconi, *Venice: An Architectural Guide* (Venice: Arsenale Editrice 1995). Zucconi begins his book with famous observations about the city which date back to the eleventh century and which share a general concern for the (sometimes dangerous) role water plays with respect to the land.



slippage, and also illustrates what will become an ongoing theme in the narrative: John's increasing inability to separate his intellectual persona from his new, fear-driven emotional state brought on by his relentless clairvoyance and future-visions. Another type of slippage takes place in this sequence, illustrated by a proliferation of slides, screens, magnifying glasses and books in the mise-en-scene. Flash-forward and montage shots begin to emerge which will recur in the course of the film and point continually to the fact that we are looking at a visual construct. Space is theorized in the film by John, while the film-space is constructed visually by the director. The audience, then, is made aware of the mechanics of the shots, causing a disruption in the traditional relationship between a film and its passive viewer. As I mentioned previously, the film invites spectators to experience film-space differently and, consequently, to theorize film-space differently. If, as Frye suggests, all eyes and attention must be focused on the stage during the theatrical production of phallocratic reality, then Roeg can be seen as intervening in his own phallocratic cinematic play by constantly exposing the conventions of filmic/visual production and disrupting spatial and temporal boundaries within the narrative of *Don't Look Now*.

The trouble in Venice begins for the Baxters when the couple meet their first round of queer characters. In Du Maurier's short story, the Scottish sisters are jokingly referred to by the couple as 'male twins in drag . . . criminals . . . changing sex at each stop. . . Twin sisters here on Torcello. Twin brothers tomorrow in Venice . . . just a matter of switching clothes and wigs'.<sup>44</sup> In the film, the women are clearly not twins, and while they claim to be sisters, an erotic relationship between them is insinuated more than once. One of the sisters, Heather, is blind and clairvoyant. She informs Laura in the ladies' room at a restaurant that her dead daughter is watching over them and is worried about John. She also tells her that John has psychic powers, which, when later told about this encounter, he vigorously denies. Laura then begins to act as a conduit between the sisters and her rationally defiant husband. The invisible background of John's world, which now consists of the sisters as well as his wife, begins to bleed into the foreground, which becomes increasingly unstable with the onset of John's own psychic future-visions. Eventually, he completely loses his capacity for professional command. At one point in the film, this physical loss of control coincides literally with a glimpse of the sisters walking past the space of John's work site. When John sees the sisters from high atop the cathedral, he *slips* and the crew of workmen he is supervising almost drop a statuette from the side of the building. In another scene, we see a montage sequence which includes the face of Heather superimposed onto a shaft of light in the church where John is working just before he falls from the scaffolding, barely escaping death. It seems that no matter how hard he tries, in Venice John cannot reproduce the architectural

<sup>44</sup> du Maurier *Don't Look Now*  
pp. 2-4

space of the past to his authoritative liking. Nor can he stop his own production of confusing visions which complicate his belief that 'seeing is believing'. His inability to decipher and hence believe in what he sees, kills him in the end as he realizes, too late, that his conception of identity is an illusion.

Any thorough reading of *Don't Look Now* should take into account the importance of the fact that the only character unable to adapt to the new and *different* conditions of his or her environment – John, the white male professional – is ruthlessly destroyed. John's inability to adapt to change corresponds to his strong and righteous sense of being able to know the truth about what he sees. The rest of the marginal figures in the film (Laura, the sisters, the Venetians) adapt to the changes taking place around them insofar as they are never positioned by the narrative as truth-seekers or, in more traditional narrative terms, are never required to act as heroes. The process of truth-seeking, which backfires on John, has little effect upon Laura, the sisters or the Venetians. Simply put, they survive the death of masculinity in the film and become dramatically positioned in the foreground by the narrative's end. The final sequence of *Don't Look Now* begins where John's death leaves off and seems to suggest a sense of cautious optimism. A crescendo of triumphant music introduces John's coffin as it floats in and then out of the frame on a flower-laden, funeral gondola, followed by another gondola, on the bow of which stand Laura and the two sisters. Their faces are stern and gloomy but they are not weeping. As she drifts by the Venetian waterfront villas, a hint of a nostalgic smile can be detected on Laura's face. She smiles again as she leads her son into the church where the funeral will be held. The musical score for this sequence, despite its obvious melancholic, discordant overtones, is, at the same time, eerily whimsical.

Another very important feature of *Don't Look Now* is the fact that a large portion of the film is devoted to John mistaking a serial killer (who happens to be a female dwarf) for a helpless small child, and a general assumption on the part of the characters in the film that the killer in Venice is a man. The moment when the identity of the radically different dwarf is revealed corresponds with the complete destruction of John's identity and a realization on his part that his vision and knowledge have been impaired all along; a long montage sequence recreates all of the moments of misidentification which have led him to this point. The dwarf is not an innocent child in need of help (John tells her, 'I am your friend. I can help you'), but a queer intersection of the boundaries between male/female, young/old, and aggressor/victim.<sup>45</sup> We can see John's death, then, as an extreme example of an implosion of the foreground/background distinction. He is killed by a female who refuses to be socially overlooked (her local fame as a terrorizing serial killer is a central trope in the film) and yet is so radically different from his

<sup>45</sup> I draw my definition of queer with respect to the character of the dwarf in *Don't Look Now* from Halberstam's conclusions about nineteenth century narratives of Gothic monstrosity which transform class, race, sexual and national relations into supernatural or monstrous features. See Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 21.

conception of *woman*, that John can only see her as a helpless child in need of patronizing, fatherly protection. John's misrecognition of the dwarf is accentuated by the fact that he cannot understand her. Though he tries to speak to her in both English and Italian, she responds to neither idiom and seems to operate in a realm somehow outside of language. While John is chasing her, the soundtrack reveals that her voice is like that of a child just learning how to talk, though the precise language is unclear. In this sense, the dwarf can be seen as thematically aligned with the city of Venice in that she has no voice of her own and yet rebels against John's attempts to rescue her. The queer combination of the deformed female dwarf and the monstrous landscape of Venice as John's primary objects of passion can be viewed as an interesting inversion of the tendency in geographical discourse to equate the beauty of landscape with notions of feminine beauty. At the end of the film, John's brutal slaying at the hands of the dwarf is coupled with a sense that he is being killed simultaneously by the landscape he has, in his Ruskinian role, been colonizing. John's murder is preceded by shots of him getting lost in a maze of Venetian alleys and, finally, shots of him being consumed by a fog which seems to rise from the city itself.

Interestingly, *Don't Look Now* was compared to *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) when it was released, but cannot be classified, like these films, as a satanic thriller. While an element of mysticism is present throughout *Don't Look Now*, an even stronger sense of historical, human agency eclipses any possibility of attributing the events of the story to Satan, which may give us a clue about the film's general lack of box-office success. In a recent article on *Blade Runner*, Marcus A. Doel and David B. Clarke mention the differences between the audience reception of the film during the Ladd Company test previews of the director's cut (which was a complete failure) and the ultimate success of the final version of the film.<sup>46</sup> Apparently, the test previews of *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1989) failed primarily because the film indicated that Harrison Ford's human character, Deckard, might actually be a non-human Replicant. The original film was criticized for leaving the question of Deckard's status as a human unanswered.

Like so many moderns, they were no doubt under the illusion that order, stability and constancy are the rule rather than the (forced) exception and that undecidability should give way to a final solution.<sup>47</sup>

As in the case of the original cut of *Blade Runner*, *Don't Look Now*, is a particularly confounding narrative with respect to order, stability and constancy, presenting its audience with a radically different conception of spatial relations. For de Lauretis, radical difference in Roeg's work is thematized and represented visually as an

<sup>46</sup> See David B. Clarke and Marcus A. Doel, 'From ramble city to the screening of the eye: *Blade Runner*, death and symbolic exchange', in Clarke (ed.), *The Cinematic City*.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

experiencing of borders: 'non-sequiturs in the dialogue, visual and aural split ends'.<sup>48</sup>

*Don't Look Now* presents us with a narrative in which dominant discourses of vision, power and knowledge are intersected and challenged through its representation of a gendered, classed and racialized landscape which fluctuates as the process of slippage between the geographical foreground and background unfolds. The primary outcome of this narrative is the creation of a radically new geography of failed masculinity. All that seems solid where the film is concerned, whether we are referring to Roeg's visually unconventional presentation of the narrative, or his character's sense of architectural/geographical control, proves to be illusory. Agency and mastery are displaced in the film. The more John exercises his geographical desire-to-know and thus overpower (both the dwarf and the terrain of Venice), the more the marginalized victims of his desire-to-know resist. As we have seen, both the dwarf and the city of Venice participate in John's death, which can be viewed, at least in part, as a symbolic death of the geographic fieldworker, as well as the visual and spatial ideology inherent in that position. While de Lauretis has provided a reading of *Bad Timing* which explores ways in which Roeg attempts to present cinematically the unspoken, erased figure of woman with her own sense of time and desire, I have addressed the ways in which the same filmic techniques are used in *Don't Look Now* to present a fragmented narrative about gendered spatial politics which distances itself from the paradigm of sexual desire (albeit not completely), and moves into the realm of power, professionalism and white, upper-class masculinity.

Unfortunately, the failure of John's masculinist expertise has proved to be analogous with the failure of the film. Evidently, it is still less collectively threatening to watch a narrative about male geographers flying high over the desert in search of the women they would die for, than to witness the monstrous return of the repressed.

# Talking the talk, walking the walk

JAMES DONALD

Why all the talk about cinema and the city just now? I had not asked this question quite so directly until *Screen* invited me to report on the Cinema and the City conference, organized at University College, Dublin by Tony Fitzmaurice and Mark Shiel in March 1999, and to review Anke Gleber's new book *The Art of Taking a Walk*.<sup>1</sup>

I had plenty of time to reflect on the question during the long flight from Australia to Dublin. Distractedly, I retraced the way I ended up working on the topic. My glib excuse for a fascination with the idea of the city is having read too many detective novels and watched too much film noir in my youth. I first began trying to work it into some sort of academic shape, though, at the Open University ten years or more ago, when I proposed an interdisciplinary course about modernity structured around studies of a number of cities at key moments in their history. That came to nothing. A couple of years later, however, a social science course called *Understanding Modern Societies* did go into production, and I grabbed the slot on the city in modernity.

The chapter I wrote was framed in terms (following Lefebvre) of the city as representational space. I also scripted a television programme looking at representations of urban space in nineteenth and early twentieth-century photography and the city symphony films of the 1920s (based on interviews with John Tagg and Annette Michelson I did in New York with a terrible hangover the day after the 1992 UK election). Even when I had completed that work, I felt that neither component was wholly satisfactory. As I finished the

1 Anke Gleber *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flânerie, Literature and Film in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

text, I became increasingly doubtful about the representation paradigm and frustrated by my inability to come up with a persuasive conclusion. I was uneasy, too, about the oppositions I set up between planners and *flâneurs* in the chapter, and between the governmentalist pragmatics of much nineteenth-century documentary photography described by Tagg and the modernist poetics of the films analyzed by Michelson. Although these oppositions worked pedagogically, did they not in the end reproduce de Certeau's melodramatic contrast between the concept city of the *dieu voyeur* and the poetic, metaphorical space of creative pedestrians?

As usual, the solution to my dilemma was staring me in the face, even if I could not see it. This initial work on the city was done just after I had finished editing a BFI reader on *Fantasy and the Cinema*. It took Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny* to point me towards the letter on the mantelpiece.<sup>2</sup> In retrospect, it was obvious that my interest in the cinematic uncanny was not a separate issue from my fascination with the city, but an intimately linked and complementary aspect of it. This realization led to an article working through the relationship between city and cinema as historically and culturally specific structures of visibility, and so to a significant re-evaluation of Vertov's relationship to the city. Rather than see his Kino-Eye as an alternative to Le Corbusier's hubristic bossiness – and despite my enduring love for *Man with the Movie Camera* – I had to admit that Vertov's frenetic nosiness shared the architect's will to transparency. Bringing city and cinema together, then, went on to open up a series of questions, even if cinema was not always explicitly an issue, that spawned a series of essays and, eventually, a book about the city as a category of modern thought and experience.<sup>3</sup>

I mention the way I have fumbled and stumbled my way through aspects of the cinema-city conundrum because I suspect that my journey may not be untypical of the way other people have lighted on the topic. The cinema and the city can be seen not just as two defining modern institutions, but as *topoi* that make it possible to begin to tell a different history of cinema as part of a non-reductionist and non-teleological reflection on the concept of modernity. Gleber's book is itself a product and an example of this revisionist move. It is a tendency that embraces a wide range of critics and theorists; among them Miriam Hansen, Annette Michelson, Tom Gunning, Jonathan Crary, Anne Friedberg, Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, a number of feminist Weimar scholars including Patrice Petro, Gertrud Koch and Janet Lungstrum, Giuliana Bruno writing especially on Italy,

2 Anthony Vidler *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992)

3 James Donald *Imagining the Modern City* (London: Athlone Press, 1999)

4 The richness of this admittedly recent tradition makes John B. Thompson's omission of cinema from his study *The Media and Modernity* all the more reprehensible. This is discussed in James Donald and Stephanie Donald, 'The publicness of cinema', in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds), *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Edward Arnold, 1999).

5 Mladen Dolar, 'I shall be with you on your wedding night', *October* no. 58 (1991), p. 7.

and so on.<sup>4</sup> However diverse in perspective and style, they represent a historiographical approach that opens the study of film up to sociological and philosophical issues without disavowing the continuing centrality of spectatorship. This approach does, however, supplement an interest in film narratives with a broader conception of cinema's power to shape the experiential time and space of modernity. It also moves beyond the old spectator/audience opposition to address the types of public sphere cinema brought into being. In doing so, it offers an alternative way into the questions of community and difference that tended to be reduced to 'identity politics' in some versions of cultural studies.

But why bring together cinema and city *now*? Why, to put it another way, return to the blossoming, final flowering and decline of modernism in the earlier part of the twentieth century just as postmodernism becomes a cliché and the millennium is supposed to make us all think about nothing but the future? What I share with the historians I have mentioned, and what tends to make them (us) think cinema and city together, is a hunch that what is interesting and important about postmodernism is more likely to be discovered in the *modernism* than in the *post*. The cinema-city couplet produces an emphasis not on the stale newness of postmodernity, but on the increasing, yet revealing, anachronism of modernity. This disjunctive temporality is what makes the cinematic and urban uncanny so important. remember Mladen Dolar's wonderful definition of postmodernism as modernism with the uncanny put back in.<sup>5</sup> The datedness of cinema and city thus provides an alternative to technophilic gee-whizzery or apocalyptic soothsaying as ways of thinking about the future. It offers a way of thinking less *about* the future than (with a nod to Deleuze and Nietzsche) *on behalf of* the future.

## Talking

The Cinema and the City conference is just one of a number of recent events. In Antwerp in November 1998, Kino-Eye 3/CyberCities combined a terrific (if slightly predictable) season of films exemplifying 'the relocation of urban space' (city symphonies plus post-cyber urban filmscapes) with a conference starring many of the usual suspects (Boyer, Bukatman, Sassen, Soja, et al.). This set out to explore 'the relationship between visual media and urban structures, between the disappearance of public city space and the budding urban infrastructure (virtual libraries, museums, theaters, bookstores, banks, shopping centers, . . .) on the internet'. 'What can we learn from these new cohabitation models, from these "cities of

bits”?” asked the organizers. ‘Is the city of tomorrow a hypnotic, vertiginous mirage inspired by *Blade Runner* and Baudrillard or a concrete – albeit anti-spatial – collective of conscious users?’ More recently, another season of films, *The Vienna Effect*, in Los Angeles in April, was accompanied by a conference at UCLA that explored ‘images and imaginings’ of the city, bringing the sort of historical perspectives I have described to bear on that other capital of modernity. Among the speakers were Janet Bergstrom on Lang and Vienna, Sabine Hake on Vienna as an imaginary city, Anthony Vidler on film space and architecture space, and Peter Wollen on *The Third Man*.

The Dublin conference lacked such a clear focus or polemic. It more than made up for this, however, through the efficiency of its electronic advertising. Postings announcing it had reached me from at least a dozen different sources, until I finally caved in. Obviously I was not alone. This was a truly global event. Over half the papers were given by speakers from the USA or Canada – timing the conference the weekend before St Patrick’s Day was a smart move, and the spectacular firework display over the Customs House in the city centre kicking off Dublin’s Millennium party was an incidental but memorable highlight. Fewer than a third of the papers were given by speakers from the UK or Ireland. (Europe, Australia, Japan and South Africa supplied the rest.) In general, the standard of papers struck me as remarkably and consistently high.

The impetus behind the conference soon became clear. Tony Fitzmaurice and Mark Shiel were frank about their desire to raise the profile of the University as a centre for film studies, and to stage a conference that would help them do so. In selecting a topic, they were especially concerned to reflect the increasing interdisciplinarity of film studies. They rejected the millennium as already overdone, and film theory since the 1970s as insufficiently interdisciplinary. Hence the focus on the city. Given the special place Dublin has in the history of modernist representations of the experience of city, it made a lot of sense. (Often the random facts from conferences stay with me long after the substance of the papers has grown dim. I shall remember two from this one, both about James Joyce: in 1909 he opened and, for a short time, ran Dublin’s first cinema, the Volta, off O’Connell Street, he is on record as wanting Walter Ruttmann to make a film of *Ulysses*.)

The presence of Kevin Rockett and Rod Stoneman (these days Chief Executive of the Irish Film Board) ensured that the politics of local film production and Irish film history popped up throughout the conference. This produced a greater emphasis on the city–country relationship than one might have expected. Although Rockett’s keynote address was mainly concerned with his current researches into the history of the Irish film censors, he ascribed their suspicions of the medium to a deep-rooted sense that modern city life is



incompatible with the authentic community of family and nation on which the new Ireland was to be based. Stoneman made a similar point on the panel I shared with him and Graham Roberts from the University of Leeds. Stoneman was explaining his attempts to persuade Irish cinema audiences (especially those under the age of thirty-five) that not all contemporary Irish film is set in an idyllic rural past. (The cultural problem he faces was brought home to me on the plane back to Australia, when I watched a large chunk of *Waking Ned* (Kirk Jones, 1998). It is a nasty little film. It comes on as heart-warming, but uses every cynically sentimental cliché of Irish rogues to beguile its audience. The end credits reveal just how sham it all is. The film was made in the Isle of Man with the backing of the Isle of Man Film Board, and, apparently, the original script was set in Yorkshire!) In a detailed historical paper effectively illustrated with clips, Roberts showed that the representation of country and city in Soviet films during 1924–34 did not just reflect changing policies on the economic relationship between the two, and the consequent tensions between peasants and workers, rather, he argued, cinema was used as a tool in the attempts to impose those policies.

The other two keynote addresses, by Mike Davis and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, also pointed to dominant themes in the conference. One, perhaps inevitably, was the noir city. This provided the cinematic thread in Mike Davis's introductory lecture. As always, his was a fascinating performance. Alternately prickly, pugnacious and inclusive, apparently spontaneous although meticulously prepared and rehearsed, he is an urban researcher in the tradition of Robert Park and a storyteller as compelling (and maybe in the end as sentimental) as O'Henry. Here he traced the history of Bunker Hill in Los Angeles from its role as a Casbah in *Criss Cross* (Robert Siodmak, 1949) and existential wasteland in *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955) to the urban battlefield of all against all in John Carpenter's *They Live* (1988). Davis's punch-line was that Bunker Hill is now the location of the Bonaventure Hotel, that scratching post for anyone with anything to say about postmodernism. He also offered a brief audit of the social and cultural costs of the overweening attempt to make Los Angeles the hub of a Pacific rim economy that failed to materialize as predicted.

It was not so much Davis's engaged social critique of today's global, but increasingly differentiated and inequitable cities that set the tone for much of what followed. (The city was mostly discussed in terms of space and place or of cultural metaphor, not in terms of the difficult question of community.) Rather, the defining note struck by Davis was his ambivalent fascination with Los Angeles. This was soon established as the heart of the conference's darkly imagined atlas of cinema-cities, along, perhaps, with a sepia-toned Weimar

Berlin. (New York, London and Paris made surprisingly few appearances, but it was good to see at least some discussion of East European, Asian and southern hemisphere cities )

Fascination with the noir city, its nostalgic past and its projection onto a dystopian future, shows no sign of weakening its grip on the academic imagination. I did not get to all the sessions on this theme. Of the papers I did hear, however, the highlight was Edward Dimendberg's account of the 'parallel modernities' in Weimar cinema and film noir. I cannot do the paper justice. It was the last paper of a long day, the jet lag was kicking in, and I was unreasonably irritated by the paper that came before it – Foster Hirsch's very literary and impressionistic (though unillustrated) romp through images of the city in what he termed 'neo-noir'. Dimendberg acknowledged the force of the critique of noir as a genre offered by people like Thomas Elsaesser and Steve Neale, and laid very effectively into the 'emigre thesis' – the idea that the noir style was, as it were, imported into Hollywood in the suitcases of German directors on the run from Nazism. Nevertheless, he defended the category of noir as a mode of specifically urban representation, suggesting how it might be seen as an expression of a modernist architectural imagination.

The question of cinema and architecture was touched on obliquely in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's plenary on 'cities real and imagined'. This was a characteristically thought-provoking and engaging, if slightly undercooked, meditation on the ontology of cinematic urban space. Aligning himself with one aspect of Bazin (the sympathetic critic of neorealism), Nowell-Smith admitted to an ethical preference for a certain type of location shooting over the artifice of studio sets. He could neither wholly explain nor fully justify it, but it clearly had something to do with signification and the limits of coding. Whereas in the studio the set is constructed to be subservient to the event, on location the 'thingness' of an urban setting inevitably reminds us of 'the prior claims of real things over ideas'. We are forced, said Nowell-Smith bravely, to recognize 'the world for what it is'.

That sense of what the world is, or at least what the experiential urban world is, may in part be a response to the materiality of space. But it is just as much about the contingency of events. That was underlined, for me, in a session I went to after Nowell-Smith's paper. David Sorfa offered a surrealist analysis of the oppressiveness of urban space, wittily exemplified with examples from Svankmajer, Trnka, Welles's *Trial* and the Brothers Quay (also the topic of a paper by Tyrus Miller.) This was juxtaposed against a tantalizing but very pragmatic account by Stephen Roe, showing how architects are using computerized animation techniques to design for human movement through space. Fortuitously placed between the two was Michael Ireton's discussion of what he called 'the utopian impulse' in a group of architects and filmmakers (some of whom were both)

Piranesi, Eisenstein, Vertov, Le Corbusier and Bernard Tschumi Iretton was using *utopian* in quite a distinct way, which I happen to agree with, that is, in Gianni Vattimo's sense of oscillation and disorientation. Although this provided the link between the two papers, for me it underscored the limitations of the example of computer-animated simulation of movement around a building shown by Roe. This demonstrated that disturbingly smooth and blinkered glide through space that has become a staple of special effects when done at high speed in movies. Now, whether you approach it through Nowell-Smith's phenomenology of space, or through the analytic spatial montage of an Eisenstein or a Vertov – or for that matter through the sociology of Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer – the point is that we simply do not experience movement through space in that way. This was also the lesson of Robert Montgomery's perverse, first-person *The Lady in the Lake* (1947) that human perception is inherently analytic. I am not *just* a camera. The implication is that, quite practically, architects would do well to look carefully at film. It will give them a far better understanding of the resonances of space and the profane, inventive semiotics of pedestrian movement than the most sophisticated computer programme.

## Walking

This was the type of provocative connection that made the Dublin conference especially valuable for me. The question of the arts and analytics of walking also provided a useful backdrop for reading Anke Gleber's *The Art of Taking a Walk*, which was waiting for me when I got back to Australia. So too, of course, did several of the papers that addressed questions around Weimar cinema. Among the outstanding ones were Anthony Coulson on Pabst's *Joyless Street* (1925), Peter Jelavich on Piel Jutz's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1931), and Martin Gaughan's sketch of Weimar thinking about cinema, architecture and capitalism.<sup>6</sup>

For Gleber, *flânerie* is a mode of perception and representation that is unique to, and expressive of, modernity, one that enables the *flâneur* to experience the streets of the modern city as interiors and 'its traffic and commodities as images of reflection'. The value of the concept is that it thus provides a way into the intersections between modernity, vision and public space. While agreeing with that, I must admit to a sceptical gasp at Gleber's description of the *flâneur* as 'an important, yet underappreciated, presence in literature, film, and culture' (p. viii). Important, sure, but appreciated almost to death over the past ten years, I would say. It is a tribute to the quality of Gleber's book that it brushed my *flânerie*-fatigue aside and rekindled my enthusiasm.

<sup>6</sup> Also relevant was Paula Massood's gentle but entirely justified aside about the gender ratio of papers at the conference. Given the amount and quality of scholarship by women in this field, it is a pity that all three keynotes were given by white men of a certain age! Massood's own paper on the value of Bakhtin's concept of chronotopes for the analysis of cinematic representations of Afro-American cities or neighbourhoods was also one of the few to address directly the politics of race and difference.

The first part of the book reprises a theory of literary and sociological *flânerie* in relation to 'the city of modernity' (for her Paris, but also Berlin). This is well done, with some unfamiliar texts added to the stew, but the general argument and perspective are pretty well known by now. The second part adds a new character to the regular cast of Benjamin, Kracauer, Simmel and company. This is Franz Hessel, a self-conscious theorist of *flânerie* in Weimar Berlin as well as a contributor to the *Kino-Debatte* in the 1920s and, incidentally, the prototype of the Jules character in *Jules et Jim*. This is valuable new research, which significantly shifts the symbolic geography of *flânerie*. For me, however, the book really takes off in the second half, where Gleber systematically works through the relationship between *flânerie* and film and then uses this as a springboard for her discussion of female *flânerie*.

Rather than summarizing Gleber, I want to indicate the value of her book for thinking modernity by focusing briefly on a small but significant point with which I disagree. This comes in her discussion of the presentation of images of women in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: the Symphony of the City* (1927). She sees as crucial one scene that for her 'provides a striking commentary on the question of the female flaneur'. This is the sequence showing 'a woman who literally "walks" the boulevards of Berlin', and then, turning a street corner, 'focuses her gaze on a man through a shopping window' (p. 180). The question, for Gleber, is the familiar one *flâneuse* or prostitute? She takes Kracauer to task for assuming the latter, and suggests that although this is, to be sure, a pick-up, it is one initiated by the woman, without the sleazy connotations of 'business'.

I must admit that I had always interpreted the scene like Kracauer. After reading Gleber's account I looked again at the film. Her reading (even though in the end I am not persuaded by it) makes me more conscious of the way that this scene does have the effect of producing a retrospective closure in relation to the shots of other women walking the Berlin streets which precede it. The ambiguity about *their* status – a narratively unavoidable but undeniably sexist 'are they or aren't they?' – tends to be resolved, consciously or not, in favour of 'presumably they are'. This may simply indicate that my perceptions are as guiltily complicit as Kracauer's. But what follows if Gleber's account is right? There are two possibilities. *Either* the film is uncharacteristically naive in simply observing these women and this exchange without being aware of the way their coding invokes the links between *flânerie*, the eroticism of the gaze, and commodity exchange; *or else* the film is preternaturally sophisticated in suckering its spectators (and I suspect not only its male spectators) into a false reading with its proto-Mulveyan ruse. If that is the case, why then is the film so forgiving or so negligent as not to tell us we

have been suckered? Neither option seems altogether plausible. I still think that the obviously staged encounter around the corner does present us with prostitute and John. What is more, Gleber's reading makes me think that the scene is carefully packaged and placed to elicit my naive response, which then anchors the film's subtext around sexuality and commodification that she brings out so revealingly in her analysis. In other words, does not my conventional reading support her overall thesis as well as, if not better than, her revisionist interpretation?

The reason for singling out this difference is not to say that I am right and Gleber is wrong – far from it. Nor is it even to suggest that Gleber's misreading (if that is what it is) is an exceptionally creative one. The point is to show the productivity of thinking the city with cinema. Putting them together does not necessarily teach you to produce 'better' readings of film texts. Rather, it links the question of film spectatorship and the question of public space inevitably to the sort of uncertainty and disorientation that Michael Ireton in Dublin identified as utopian.

In that spirit, I would even claim that thinking the city through cinema makes it possible to grasp Sue Golding's political ethic: 'the whole focus now comes upon the importance – no, the *necessity* – to re-cover "urban-ness" in all its anomie, and rather chaotic heterogeneity, if we are indeed serious about creating a radically pluralistic and democratic society'.<sup>7</sup> In the end, again, thinking about the passing modernity of cinema and city in these postmodern times is a way of thinking on behalf of future people and places – in Gleber's case, reconstructing Ruttmann's narrative on behalf of future women in a utopian (that is, uncertain and disoriented) public sphere. The philosopher John Rajchman makes the best case for joining city and cinema.

The principle of such other, invisible, future peoples is not some recognition withheld by a state or its majority. Rather, we can invent the other peoples that we already are or may become as singular beings only if our being and being-together are indeterminate – not identifiable, given, recognizable in space and time – in other words, if our future remains unknown and our past indeterminate such that our very narratives can go out of joint, exposing other histories in our histories, releasing the strange powers of an artifice in our very 'nature'. Fiction and cinema have both explored the powers, the times, the spaces of this principle of the future city.<sup>8</sup>

7 Sue Golding. 'Quantum philosophy: impossible geographies and a few small points about life, liberty and the pursuit of sex (all in the name of democracy)' in Michael Keith and Steve Pile. *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 216.

8 John Rajchman. *Constructions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998) p. 113.

## The Godard dossier

## Introduction. Jean-Luc Godard: *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998)

MICHAEL WITT

1998 saw the completion of Jean-Luc Godard's enormously ambitious four-and-a-half-hour, eight-part audiovisual history of the cinema, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. The commercial availability of these videos, and of the four books based on them, has been accompanied in France by extensive attention to Godard and his work in the mainstream media and, already, by a considerable number of critical assessments of *Histoire(s)* in academic essays, journals and conferences. It should be stressed, however, that far from a passing media coup on Godard's part, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* represents the realization and culmination of a project cherished and nurtured for almost three decades – that of thinking film history through images and sounds. As early as the beginning of the 1970s Godard proposed an image/text collage scenario for a project on the history of cinema to Italian television (RAI). In 1978 the project reappeared, this time at the Montreal Film School (the Conservatoire d'Art Cinématographique), where Godard – at the invitation of Serge Losique, and following in the steps of Henri Langlois – delivered a series of lectures (or *voyages*, as Godard called them) on cinema history. Rather than delivering lectures, Godard proposed a form of historical cinematic montage, whereby the projection of one of his own films, together with a range of other films, would provide the basis for a reflection on cinema history and his place within it. These lectures, partially transcribed and published in France in 1980 as *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*,<sup>1</sup> were never intended

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1980).

as an end in themselves, but rather as the 'scenario' for a series of films on cinema history. Although this project failed to materialize in this form, we are now seeing its fulfilment through video in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. If the Montreal lectures constitute an initial attempt to map out some of the key concerns that recur across *Histoire(s)*, the 1980s give rise to an analogous experiment with the Rotterdam Arts Foundation, followed by early draft video versions of the first episodes (or 'chapters') in the mid 1980s (at this point seen only by critics and friends such as Alain Bergala and Freddy Buache). The first two chapters were broadcast in France in 1989 (Canal Plus) and 1990 (FR3), and in the UK in 1993 (Channel Four), and other chapters were shown at festivals throughout the 1990s, before the world premiere of the work in its entirety at the Institut français in London in September 1997. Before the release of the final version last year on video, Godard re-edited each chapter, some of them significantly. The chapters in this final version are:

- 1A Toutes les histoires (All the [Hi]Stories), 51 mins.
- 1B Une Histoire seule (A Solitary [Hi]Story/Only One [Hi]Story), 42 mins
- 2A Seul le cinéma (The Cinema Alone/Only the Cinema), 26 mins
- 2B Fatale beauté (Fatal Beauty), 28 mins.
- 3A La Monnaie de l'absolu (The Twilight of the Absolute), 26 mins.
- 3B Une Vague nouvelle (A New Wave/A Vague Piece of News), 27 mins
- 4A Le Contrôle de l'univers (The Control of the Universe), 27 mins.
- 4B Les Signes parmi nous (The Signs Amongst Us), 38 mins.

The aim of this short dossier is not so much to provide an overview of the themes, motifs, structures and forms of the project (for which the reader is directed to the bibliography), as to suggest one or two of the historical, theoretical and pedagogical debates that an encounter with *Histoire(s) du cinéma* might provoke.

# The signs amongst us: Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

JAMES S. WILLIAMS

*Cinema is a sign, and its signs are amongst us.*

Jean-Luc Godard<sup>1</sup>

*History attempts to transform destiny into consciousness, and  
art to transform it into freedom.*

André Malraux<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Godard in Alain Bergala (ed.) *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* Volume II 1984–98 (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma 1998) p. 17. Henceforth *Godard par Godard II*.

<sup>2</sup> André Malraux *Les Voix du silence* (Paris: Gallimard 1951) p. 621.

## 1998 – annus mirabilis

There have been many peaks in Jean-Luc Godard's long career, but 1998 must surely rank as one of the highest, marking the completion of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and its commercial release through Gaumont as a four-part video boxed-set. A four-volume art book version, coproduced by Gaumont and Gallimard and part of the latter's prestigious *Collection Blanche* normally reserved for writers, was also released in France to general critical acclaim. Currently in preparation are an English translation of the text, a CD in different languages, a digital video disk and possibly even a CD-ROM. Yet 1998 also saw the publication of three short texts by Godard, all subtitled *phrases* (*Deux fois cinquante ans de cinéma français* [2 × 50 Years of French Cinema [1995], *Les Enfants jouent à la Russie* [1993], *Allemagne année 90 neuf zéro*/Germany Year 90 Nine Zero [1991]), which complemented those that appeared in 1996 in the same POL series (*JLG/JLG* and *For Ever Mozart*). These texts are



'derived' from recent film and video work by Godard, and are not proposed as faithful transcriptions of the soundtrack. Finally, the five-hundred-page second instalment of *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* was published by *Cahiers du cinéma*, edited, like the first, by Alain Bergala and covering the period 1984 to 1998, a period during which, it is perhaps worth recalling, Godard made eight feature films and over fifteen video pieces and small films, many in collaboration with Anne-Marie Miéville.

The personal visibility of Godard in 1998 – which included front-page coverage in the newspaper *Libération*, receiving a César on behalf of the Nouvelle Vague and having interviews with Bergala relayed in retail outlets like FNAC – was matched by his sudden commercial popularity. The reasonably priced and easily transportable video and book sets of *Histoire(s)*, distinguished by the same style of packaging, sold out almost immediately throughout France. This fact may seem all the more surprising and ironic in view of Godard's constant counterposing, in recent years, of culture as merely distribution and merchandising (Karajan on RCA records is his preferred example) and art as the exception to the rule.<sup>3</sup> For Godard, however, 'democratic' culture can also have a positive, pedagogical role, and right from the beginning of *Histoire(s)*, when he outlined in an interview with Serge Daney in *Libération* his general aims for the project, he has harboured the notion of this work being available to the public and performing an educative function (see Michael Temple's discussion of Godard and pedagogy in this dossier).<sup>4</sup>

### Hi/stories

The book of *Histoire(s)*, which is subtitled 'Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma la seule la vraie' ('Introduction to a true history of cinema, the only one, the right one'), clearly marks the culmination of a long project by Godard to bring together his personal history and the impersonal nature of history and cinema. I will return to the specific question of the book later, but would like to focus first on some of the general issues raised by the project. *Histoire(s)* is attempting to tell the history of cinema by its own formal means: that is, in recorded time. Yet the history of cinema, or rather 'all the stories' of cinema – the multiple, narrative potentialities of its past – also offer Godard a privileged means of access to the whole question of history on account of the medium's direct relationship with the visible, a story that as yet 'has no words'. By virtue of simply having recorded images, cinema for Godard is the only proper trace, or proof, of the historical real. In his view there are two kinds of history, one into which we project ourselves, and the other that projects itself into us. In *Histoire(s)* he seeks, therefore, to present himself and his films as simply elements

<sup>3</sup> See for example Jean-Luc Godard in conversation with Colin McCabe in Duncan Petrie (ed.) *Screening Europe: Image and Identity in Contemporary European Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992) pp. 97–105, 103.

<sup>4</sup> See Godard makes (hi)stories interview with Serge Daney in Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy (eds) *Jean-Luc Godard: Son+Image 1974–1991* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992) pp. 159–67.

among others in a vast flux of images and stills, sounds and sensations, culled from Hollywood and European cinema and newsreels, from spoken and written texts, music, paintings, drawings, cartoons, computer graphics, and so on

At the risk of gross oversimplification, Godard's principal thesis in *Histoire(s)* is that cinema reneged on its duty to represent reality. Originally conceived as a screening or 'projection' of the real, cinema was a democratic experience, since it allowed people the chance to project themselves into the world and so rediscover it in a moment of pure vision. Yet cinema quickly became obsessed with the need for spectacle, abdicating its documentary power and potential for engendering new ideas and sensations in favour of two very familiar stories: sex and death. Commerce soon took over and, with the arrival of the usurping, illegitimate tyrant known as the talkie, cinema began to lie – even 'forgetting' to film the Nazi concentration camps. In Godard's way of thinking, it is a short step from this moment of criminal neglect to the current tyranny of mass communications and 'culture', where the freedom and art of cinema have all but been destroyed. The postwar movements of Italian Neorealism (in particular Roberto Rossellini) and the French Nouvelle Vague, along with the exceptional figure in American cinema of Alfred Hitchcock (for Godard the 'absolute master' – see Jonathan Rosenbaum's exploration of Godard's critical view of Hitchcock in this dossier), provide rare moments of professional pride and nostalgia in what is essentially a tragic narrative of waste and shame.

It is still too early to assess the full implications and complexities of Godard's historiographic work. Apart from a few close readings of early chapters, much of the critical work on *Histoire(s)* produced thus far has been fairly general, as critics have tried simply to take stock of each new instalment of material and of Godard's extensive running commentary on the project.<sup>5</sup> The November 1998 special issue of the French *Art Press*, intended as a 'guide' to the completed work, brought together a variety of French, German and US film theorists, philosophers and independent filmmakers, and demonstrated the wide interdisciplinary interest in *Histoire(s)*.

That said, it is clear that *Histoire(s)* invites specific theoretical approaches. An exclusively historical perspective would need to compare Godard's notion of history with the methodological breakthroughs of Fernand Braudel and Michel Foucault, whom he invokes as kindred spirits working in the fields of economic and epistemological history. It would show that by mixing cinema and film criticism Godard is situating himself in a long and noble line of French filmmakers who doubled up as historians of cinema (such as Louis Delluc and René Clair), as well as distancing himself from traditional film historians, such as Georges Sadoul, who tend to reproduce the same events in the same order, albeit with different

5 See Jean-Louis Leurat *Histoire(s) du cinéma ou comment devenir maître d'un souvenir* Cinéma no. 5 (1994) pp. 19–24 (on the first part of Chapter 1A) Jacques Aumont *Beaute fatale souci* note sur un épisode des *Histoire(s) du cinéma* Cinéma no. 12 (1998) pp. 17–25 (on Chapter 2B) and James S. Williams *Beyond the cinematic body: human emotion vs. digital technology* in Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* in Scott Brewster and John Joughin (eds) *Thinking the Inhuman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press forthcoming 1999) (on Chapter 1B) On October 6 1995 *Le Monde* (Supplément livres pp. x–xi) published transcripts of a round table discussion on *Histoire(s)* held between writers, historians and philosophers such as Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben during the 1995 Lugano Film Festival at which Godard was present

6 Jonathan Rosenbaum Bande  
annonce pour les *Histoire(s)* du  
cinéma de Godard *Trafic* no 21  
(1997) pp 5–18 Translated as  
Trailer for Godard's *Histoire(s)* du  
cinéma *Vertigo* no 7 (1997)  
pp 12–20

critical emphases. As Jonathan Rosenbaum has emphasized by comparing *Histoire(s)* to James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* on account of their similar use of recurring motifs and multilingual phrases, Godard treats both the twentieth century and the history of cinema (the history of modernism) as effectively terminated.<sup>6</sup>

A purely aesthetic approach would consider the many theories of art and metaphysics produced and discussed, in particular the sustained treatment of Hermann Broch, notably in Chapter 2B, 'Fatale beauté', where Godard charts cinema's fatal attraction for an impossible, feminine beauty at the cost of its own unique power and mystery. Hollywood, he claims, ended up as part of the cosmetics industry. This would lead necessarily to an ethical examination; for example, of Godard's apparent aestheticization of the newsreel in order to mount a critique of Hollywood, as when he introduces George Stevens's 1951 film *A Place in the Sun*, starring Liz Taylor and Montgomery Clift, by showing bleeding images of Stevens's own colour footage of Ravensbruck.

In each case, however, the broad philosophical questions raised by Godard's exploration of the process of memory and his self-assigned role as witness would have to be taken into account. For as *Histoire(s)* develops, Godard's scepticism towards the very notion and possibility of history becomes more acute. Already in Chapter 2A he types on the screen. 'Faire une description précise de ce qui n'a jamais eu lieu est le travail de l'historien' ('The work of the historian is to provide a precise description of what never happened') By the last chapter, 4B, which includes a long sequence constructed around Charles Péguy's work *Cho* (1917) – a 'dialogue' of history and the pagan soul that presents history as the daughter of memory – Godard declares that the mere collection of the facts of history is not enough, and may even prove unhelpful for the task of analyzing the past. 'on peut tout faire excepté l'histoire de ce qui se fait' ('one can do everything except the history of what is happening'). Indeed, in the last, highly personal stages of *Histoire(s)*, the tone changes as Godard pursues an ethical and philosophical discussion on the nature of humanity and human relations, delivering statements such as 'Love of those who are closest is an act', and 'Amor omnia vincit'. The moving climax to the work is an image of Godard's face superimposed both by a white rose and a painted landscape featuring a solitary walker, while he reads a quote from Borges on Coleridge

si un homme / si / un homme / traversait / le paradis / en songe /  
qu'il reçut une fleur / comme preuve / de son passage / et qu'à  
son réveil / il trouvât / cette fleur / dans ses mains / que dire /  
alors / j'étais cet homme  
(if a man / if / a man / crossed / paradise / in a dream / [and]  
received a flower / as proof / of his passage / and on waking up /

found / this flower / in his hands / what's to say / then / I was  
that man)

It is, in fact, the role and status of painting in *Histoire(s)* that I would like to consider now, for Godard has talked of the texture of the project expressly in terms of 'painting history' and 'pure painting'.<sup>7</sup> This will lead necessarily to a discussion of Godard's videographic style.

<sup>7</sup> See Gavin Smith's 1996 interview with Godard in David Sterritt (ed.) *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews* (Mississippi: Mississippi University Press, 1998), pp. 179–93. 188. Jacques Aumont has explored at length Godard's status as a painter in *L'Œil interminable: cinéma et peinture* (Paris: Seguirer, 1989), pp. 223–47.

<sup>8</sup> Elie Faure, *Histoire de l'art* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1964).

### Painting/history

The title and multiple structure of *Histoire(s)* invites immediate links with Elie Faure's magnum opus, *Histoire de l'art*,<sup>8</sup> and Faure, of course, has always been a point of artistic reference for Godard, notably in *Pierrot le fou* (1965). However, *Histoire(s)* also forms a direct relationship with André Malraux's four-part examination of the evolution of art, *Les Voix du silence*. The title of Chapter 3A, for example, is taken from that of the final part of Malraux's study, 'La Monnaie de l'absolu' (literally, 'The change [as in exchange, or barter] of the absolute', although officially translated as 'The twilight of the absolute'). In addition, the long sequence in Chapter 3B about cinema as the museum of the real harks back to the first part of *Les Voix du Silence*, 'Le Musée imaginaire'. There are many points of comparison and difference between Malraux and Godard in terms of their relationship to art, and I will mention only the most pertinent to this discussion. Godard, unlike Malraux, focuses almost exclusively on post-mediaeval art which he considers necessarily western because of its origins in the Church. Like Malraux, however, Godard sees Picasso as representing the end of one of the great chapters of humanity and artistic creation, and indeed *Histoire(s)* treads no further into modern art than Nicolas de Stael and Francis Bacon, artists who still retain some notion of the figure and are on this side of full abstraction. It is Godard's view that once art entered the realm of abstraction and lost figurative contact with the historical real (a scheme familiar in art history), it was left to cinema to provide it. Malraux puts this a little differently: that art became abstract once cinema arrived and proceeded to usurp art's function of portraying movement and fiction (he makes a specific link between the filmic succession of shots and the style of the Baroque). Either way, painting passed on to cinema a moral and ethical obligation, one that defined western morality itself, and an obligation of which cinema became the last representative. Hence photography first assumed the colours of mourning – black and white – because it had effectively extracted life from the real (Technicolor, in all its dazzle, wished only to forget that fact.) Yet cinema's moral imperative quickly disappeared as the medium became subject to commerce. It was only

during those odd moments when the cinematic image recovered its documentary status, as in the small amount of footage taken of the concentration camps, that cinema honoured its moral dimension and redeemed itself, in the process acquiring the status of true art. Godard states in Chapter 1A, quoting Malraux, 'le seul art qui ait été véritablement populaire retrouve la peinture, c'est-à-dire ce qui renaît dans ce qui a été brûlé' ('the only art which was truly popular regains painting, that is to say art, that is, what is reborn in what has been burnt')<sup>9</sup>

In *Histoire(s)* Godard is in genuine awe of painting and art, and in particular of certain works like Picasso's 'Guernica', inspired by real and traumatic historical events, because, in their 'thereness' and 'completeness', they possess this resurrecting power at every moment. Indeed, only exceptional filmmakers such as Dreyer and Hitchcock can, according to Godard, be said to have filmed 'miracles'. Part of the problem for cinema, of course, is that it is too connected to the real by virtue of recording it, and thus comes directly under the influence of death. It is death at work, and since the story of the twentieth century is one of war and the camps, there is literally an overkill of death. The faces caught in early newsreels are like disembodied ghosts in Godard's machine, and they set up through repetition, overlap and relay endless cycles of mourning, a pathos only heightened by the fact that the very material of film, nitrate, is steadily decomposing.

Yet it is Godard's central aim in *Histoire(s)* to privilege and celebrate the resurrecting potential of film, the process whereby cinema, like the painting of Edouard Manet (the subject of a small study in Chapter 3A framed in the context of Georges Bataille), sacrifices the real by putting it to death and then mourning it. Although 'killed off', however, the real does not totally disappear, since the sacrifice returns the real to us and allows us to regain access to it. The projected image is effectively resurrected into light, and this is perhaps the main significance of the statement attributed to Saint Paul which Godard repeatedly cites in *Histoire(s)*: 'L'image viendra au temps de la résurrection' ('The image will come at the time of the resurrection'). Yet given that Godard is dealing explicitly with history in *Histoire(s)*, how can a wake for the real and the dead be converted into rapture? Which is to say, how can *Histoire(s)* become more than simply what Philippe Sollers has called, with regard to the project, 'the barter of cinema', that is, a negative illustration of the 'enormous fantasmagoria' that must be undergone before a 'true', transcendent work of painting can be successfully completed<sup>10</sup>. The key here is montage, which for Godard constitutes style and, thereby, video's ethical and moral code.

9 For the best illustration of Godard's views on the nature and evolution of art and cinema see Jean-Luc Godard rencontre Régis Debray in Bergala (ed.) *Godard par Godard II* pp 423–31

10 See Philippe Sollers 'Il y a des fantômes plein l'écran' (interview with Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana) *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no 513 (1997) pp 39–48 42

- 11 Cyril Beghin 'Invention de l'animation' *Art Press* (thors series) (November 1998) pp. 52–7

Godard's online video editing in *Histoire(s)* has been well described by Cyril Beghin as a poetics of fragmentation and animation that embraces both the synthesis and analysis of movement.<sup>11</sup> It ranges from the spotting and flashing of images to their superimposition and absorption through the uneven use of slow-motion, fading in and fading out, fast-forwarding and rewinding, often with equivalent processes on the soundtrack. Figures from different images undergo similar motions and vibrations, and thus each image is opened up to others, with the result that they lose their referential and mimetic force. The effect is enhanced by Godard's complete disregard for the original intertitles of the silent films which he cites (the only titles used are his own), as well as by the overlay of his rhetorical structures, in particular the chiasmus, as in the repeated refrain, 'l'histoire de la solitude/solitude de l'histoire' ('the history of solitude/the solitude of history'). The typewritten titles have the effect of being ideograms, a fact which serves to highlight the act of enunciation rather than the statement itself, and encourages slippage from the semantic level to the phonetic. The net effect is that the viewer is totally denied the chance to participate by means of identification in the extracted sequences of film because the original processes of suture are never allowed to take hold.

- 12 Robert Bresson *Notes sur le cinématographe* (Paris: Gallimard 1975)

One of the key motifs of *Histoire(s)*, and indeed of much of Godard's later work, is Robert Bresson's statement in *Notes sur le cinématographe* that if an image expresses something too clearly and independently (in the manner of a single painting), it will neither transform itself on contact with other images nor exert a mutual influence on them.<sup>12</sup> In fact it is the almost magical, Surrealist unpredictability of Godard's videographic montage that reverses the otherwise overwhelming autonomy of painting and converts it as cinematic 'barter', thus creating a general equivalence and equality of terms. This encapsulates the principle of collage which, whether fully motivated and supremely modernist (the cubism of Braque and Picasso, the bricolage of Lévi-Strauss) or postmodernist and deconstructive (Derridean 'graft'), destroys notions of uniqueness, purity and hierarchy. The video screen of *Histoire(s)* becomes a palimpsestic space of inscription, with images acquiring the fleeting, material status of a trace and phantom. Hence, if Godard sometimes likens his work to that of a painter due to the physicality of montage, it is montage as collage – operating on the boundary between word and image and attacking the 'integrity' of painting – that best defines the nature of his editing practice.

In short, Godard achieves in *Histoire(s)* what he has been attempting for a long time: to dissolve the solidified word and so arrive (to use the terms of *Prénom Carmen/First Name Carmen* [1983]), at a stage *avant le nom* (before the name) – pure sound –

and at *l'image vierge* (before the image) – to return, that is, to a moment before the order of linguistic and cinematic syntax has taken over and words and images have lost their immediacy, freedom and innocence. We might go further and say that each image is transformed into a pure epiphany, a manifestation of the mystery of cinematographic creation. This is particularly true if we bear in mind that Godard's appreciation of Hitchcock as the greatest creator of forms this century rests on the fact that what one remembers of his films are not the narratives but the visual details – objects at their most concrete because suddenly thrown into the light. Yet in *Histoire(s)* this process always bears a historical dimension due to the critical work of Godard's montage. In the transcription of a recent address entitled 'A propos de cinéma et d'histoire' ('On cinema and history'), Godard even goes so far as to suggest that montage – or the act of creating relations between people, objects and ideas – is in itself a form of history, indeed, that montage and history are the same process.<sup>13</sup> One example will suffice. In Chapter 3A, Bresson's 1945 film, *Les Dames du bois de Boulogne/Ladies of the Park*, produced during the last months of the Occupation and the beginning of the Liberation, is actually presented as a film of French resistance (for lack of any other). Its penultimate scene of Elina Labourdette whispering 'Je lutte' ('I will fight') is juxtaposed on the soundtrack with a speech by General de Gaulle of the same period, proclaiming the need for collective struggle. It is the contention of *Histoire(s)*, in fact, that the poetic construction and application of montage (not one plus one, but one plus two) is the basic language of filmic thought, and that during the period of silent cinema montage offered the possibility of disclosing unknown truths of the world, a resource that even pioneers like Eisenstein and Welles failed to appreciate and exploit. Put a little differently, as the origin and finality of cinematic art, montage provided (in terms borrowed from Delluc) the means for life to give back to cinema that which life, during the course of the twentieth century, progressively stole from it: its power of innocence.

This idea of montage as a vehicle of redemption was, of course, already present in a 1956 article by Godard for *Les Cahiers du cinéma* entitled 'Montage, mon beau souci' (also the subtitle of Chapter 3B of *Histoire(s)*), where montage is imbued with mysterious, restorative powers, even able to reverse the flow of time.<sup>14</sup> In *Histoire(s)*, however, Godard goes further by resurrecting cinema's lost potential of montage both as a form of thought and as a transhistorical, religious event. In the extraordinary closing sequence of Chapter 3A, which presents Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1946) as an act of resistance against the uniformity of US cinema because it was shot freely and almost spontaneously outside the studio system, Godard declares that the film allowed Italy, which had twice betrayed, to recover a lost sense of national identity. He

13 In *Godard par Godard II* pp. 401–7

14 Jean-Luc Godard 'Montage, mon beau souci', *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 65 (1956). Translated by Tom Milne as 'Montage, my fine care', in Tom Milne (ed.) *Godard on Godard* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986) pp. 39–41.

15 See 'Resistance de l'art' (interview with Gilles Perrault) in *Godard par Godard II*, pp. 443–6, 444.

16 See Marie-José Mondzain, 'Histoire et passion', *Art Press* (hors série) (November 1998), pp. 91–8.

emphasizes elsewhere that only a Christian country like Italy could retrieve its identity so successfully in the image and be reborn through it.<sup>15</sup> It is as though the history of a new cinematic movement must necessarily enact a major transformation according to the narrative of the Passion, whereby the incarnation of the image constitutes a redemption of the visible by God, who through His Passion saves the fallen image. This explains, perhaps, the attention Godard gives here and throughout *Histoire(s)* to the agony in *Rome Open City* of the Communist Manfredi's torture by the Nazis after refusing to speak. As Marie-José Mondzain has argued, the moment when Italy saw its own image was a cinematic gesture of historical incarnation, one that also originally occurred in the USA (cinema providing the new country with an account of its history, the story of its birth and industrial progress).<sup>16</sup> But of course in today's commodified, global hyper-present, the image no longer has the purity or power that once justified Rossellini's famous statement 'reality is there, why manipulate it?'. The only means left for video to perform anything remotely like an equivalent style of gesture (I say 'style' because the national scale of Italian Neorealism is again impossible to duplicate) is through the development of historical montage. Indeed, Chapter 3A ends with a stunningly simple but effective act of montage that brings together Pasolini (a black and white photograph) and the Italian Renaissance (a detail of Piero della Francesca's fresco 'Legend of the True Cross') at the turning point of a chiastic inversion: 'une pensée qui forme/une forme qui pense' ('a thought that forms/a form that thinks'). Godard's insistence on the transaesthetic dimension of montage as a form of absolute returns us inevitably to Malraux, whose history of art is also specifically the history of the metamorphosis of forms and attempts to bring all artistic forms – secular and sacred – under the transhistorical umbrella of the Absolute, defined by Malraux as any authentic confrontation by human beings with a sense of their own finitude and death.

### ***Histoire(s)* the 'book'**

These, then, are the aesthetic, historical and even religious stakes of *Histoire(s)*, and they raise the question of the nature and status of the 'book' which Godard proposes as an 'anti-art book'. Certainly it is no mere reference work for the video, since the lists of films, writers and photographers provided at the back of each volume are incomplete and do not always observe the actual order of appearance. Moreover, no attempt is made to identify the paintings and other art works, which may illustrate again Godard's wish to neutralize the power of painting.<sup>17</sup> Godard, who oversaw the whole process of the book's production, preserves as much as possible of

17 Bernard Eisenschitz, who was asked by Godard to track down the film references in *Histoire(s)*, talks of his work and of the creative errors and ruptures produced in the video in 'Une machine à montrer l'invisible: conversation avec Bernard Eisenschitz à propos des *Histoire(s) du cinéma*', *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 529 (1998), pp. 52–6.



the original syntax and rhythms, although only the major voiceover passages and written texts are retained in their entirety, and certain sequences of images are sometimes shuffled out of order and lack crucial elements. In *Le Monde*, Godard presented the book as a series of 'archives' lifted directly from the video's 'archaeological enquiry', or 'ultrasound scan', of History.<sup>18</sup> In fact, new patterns and links emerge between images of varying size facing each other on the double page, as well as between blocks of typewritten text which are often fragmented (notably in the case of poetic verse). It is clear, however, that the book completes the major levelling process undertaken in the video by rendering equally flat all the various kinds of image featured (film, photography, painting, video, archive, cartoon, newsreel, documentary, advert, book-cover, intertitle). Yet can one not say, too, that these strangely calm, hybrid images of distilled energy retrieved from the noise of the machine – images which cover the entire range of artificially modulated colour, brightness, hue and contrast – represent another stage in the process of sublimation, of mourning and redeeming the real, that we have traced in the video? For have they not been liberated and, as it were, resurrected on to the page transhistorically, if only in the sense that they all bear the mark of their impersonal history and evolution in Godard's memory machine? In which case, might not the 'book' be regarded as a further stage in the continuing metamorphosis of forms, one that actually 'sacrifices' the video of *Histoire(s)* just as the latter 'sacrificed' cinema in order to recuperate it as an instrument of thought?

The answers to these different questions are far from certain, but simply to pose them is to acknowledge that Godard has now moved far beyond the cliché of the death of cinema, and the position he held in the 1970s and early 1980s on a deadly battle between video and cinema, Cain and Abel (see Michael Witt's dissection of Godard's 'death of cinema' discourse in this dossier). In *Histoire(s)* he reveals the radical potential of video as a transmutation of all images and sounds combined, and thus as a privileged site of experimentation, creativity and philosophical reflection. To revise Deleuze, 'la vidéo nous pense' ('video thinks us'). Whatever aesthetic status it may ultimately achieve (and this will be the subject of much critical discussion and debate), *Histoire(s) du cinéma* already offers a unique artistic and intellectual resource for understanding the signs amongst us.

# Le vrai coupable: two kinds of criticism in Godard's work

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Since the outset of his career, Godard has been interested in two kinds of criticism – film criticism and social criticism – and these two interests are apparent in practically everything he does and says as an artist. The first two critical texts that he published – in the second and third issues of *Gazette du cinéma* in 1950 – are entitled ‘Joseph Mankiewicz’ and ‘Pour un cinéma politique’ (‘Towards a political cinema’), and his first two features, *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (1959) and *Le Petit soldat* (1960), made about a decade later, reflect the same dichotomy.<sup>1</sup>

What I would like to do here is trace these two interests in relation to Godard's commentaries on Alfred Hitchcock. These commentaries span almost half a century, from the publication of two articles in 1952 to the completion of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–98), and I would like to make particular reference to what I regard as Godard's best single film review – his analysis of *The Wrong Man* (1957)<sup>2</sup> – and to a particular passage in the seventh and penultimate episode of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, ‘Le Contrôle de l'univers’ (‘The Control of the Universe’).

My concern is with both the continuity and discontinuity between these two texts. Godard himself emphasizes the continuity by according special attention in ‘Le Contrôle de l'univers’ to *The Wrong Man* (*Le Faux coupable*), which also happens to be the film that he analyzed in the greatest detail as a writer forty years earlier. Moreover, in both of these texts Godard gives particular emphasis to two pivotal and highly charged scenes in Hitchcock's film: the first night spent by Emmanuel Balestrero (Henry Fonda) in his prison

1 Jean-Luc Godard ‘Joseph Mankiewicz and Towards a political cinema (1972)’, in Tom Milne (ed.) *Godard on Godard* trans. Tom Milne (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986) pp. 13–16, 16–17.

2 Jean-Luc Godard ‘The Wrong Man’, in Milne (ed.) *Godard on Godard* pp. 48–55. Originally published as ‘Le cinéma et son double’, in *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 72 (June 1957).

cell, and the slow lap dissolve from Balestrero silently praying in closeup while looking at a picture of Christ, and the appearance on the street of the man for whose crime he was falsely accused, who slowly approaches the camera until the features of both men merge – an event described by Godard in both texts as a miracle. Both of these scenes, I should add, are moments when the intervention and presence of Hitchcock as a director are most apparent, both involve close shots of Henry Fonda, although the first is mainly concerned with Balestrero's experience and consciousness and the second is mainly concerned with his destiny

These are the principal forms of continuity I find between these two texts, although I am sure one could find others. What are the principal forms of discontinuity? Some of these belong to the history of reception – such as the change in Hitchcock's reputation from that of an entertainer to that of a serious artist, a change mainly brought about by the collective efforts of Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette, Bitsch, Douchet, Demonsablon and Domarchi, among others. But other forms of discontinuity can be found between the separate descriptions of Hitchcock's art offered by Godard in the two texts

In 'Le cinéma et son double', Godard's analysis of Hitchcock is concerned mainly with stylistic articulations of states of consciousness, metaphysical states of being, and thematic and dramatic significations. In 'Le Contrôle de l'univers', he is primarily concerned with Hitchcock as the only *poète maudit* who succeeded commercially, an idea coupled with the argument that Hitchcock's films are mainly remembered not for their states of consciousness, metaphysical states of being, or their thematic and dramatic significations, but for certain physical objects. To paraphrase Godard's own discourse in 'Le Contrôle de l'univers', one forgets the circumstances of why Janet Leigh is going to the Bates Hotel, why Montgomery Clift keeps his vow of silence, why Teresa Wright is still in love with Uncle Charlie, how Henry Fonda becomes the *faux coupable*, and why Ingrid Bergman is hired by the US government. But one remembers a rosary, a glass of milk, a windmill, a hairbrush, a lost pair of spectacles, a lost key and the visible notes in a musical score. Both these analyses of Hitchcock, I would argue, are anti-Bazinian in certain respects – not only because Bazin was not a Hitchcockian, but also because the first text defends Hitchcock as an expressionist, and privileges montage and transitional passages over scenes, and the second text privileges non-narrative elements over narrative elements, and perhaps what could be described as poetry over prose

Before discussing the implications of the discontinuity between the two texts, I would like to pinpoint some of the differences between the analysis of *The Wrong Man* offered in 'Le cinéma et son double' and some of the positions of both Truffaut and Hitchcock regarding the film. I would also like to note some of the discrepancies between

the true story of Christopher Emmanuel Balestrero and the story of Hitchcock's film.

Although Godard's article was indebted to Truffaut's seminal 1954 text, 'Un trousseau de fausses clés' ('Skeleton keys'),<sup>3</sup> in describing the doubling structures of *The Wrong Man*, his defence of the camera's 'gyratory movement'<sup>4</sup> around Fonda in his jail cell is the opposite of Truffaut's subsequent response in conversation with Hitchcock, which is to call this camera movement an 'antirealistic effect'.<sup>5</sup> Here is Godard's defence of the same camera movement.

Through this camera movement, he [Hitchcock] manages to express a purely physical trait: the contradiction of the eyelids as Fonda closes them, the force with which they press on the eyeballs for a fraction of a second, creating in the sensory imagination a vertiginous kaleidoscope of abstractions which only an equally extravagant camera movement could evoke successfully.<sup>6</sup>

What seems striking about this description is that it defends Hitchcock simultaneously as an expressionist and as a documentary filmmaker. The same duality informs Godard's review of *Strangers on a Train* (1951) five years earlier – which links Hitchcock with the German expressionism of Lang and Murnau while praising his sense of the real in the filming of certain scenes and locations – and it is at least implied in other critical remarks he made about Hitchcock during the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> In a 1952 article called 'Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?' ('What is cinema?'), he remarked, 'Flaherty's genius, after all, is not so far removed from that of Hitchcock – Nanook hunting his prey is like a killer stalking his victims'.<sup>8</sup> And in his 1956 review of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), he wrote: 'This is perhaps the most improbable of Hitchcock's films, but also the most realistic'.<sup>9</sup>

In 'Le Contrôle de l'univers', Godard calls Hitchcock 'le seul avec Dreyer qui a su filmer un miracle' ('the only one, together with Dreyer, who succeeded in filming a miracle'), and in 'Le cinéma et son double' he discusses not one but three miracles in the film. The first miracle, according to Godard, occurs during the hero's second imprisonment, when 'The camera retreats before Manny after having pushed him into the cell'. We hear his name being called offscreen, and we then discover that he is being released on bail.<sup>10</sup> The second miracle, which is the only one shown in 'Le Contrôle de l'univers', is the one already described in which images of the *faux coupable* and the *vrai coupable* (the right man) are superimposed. And the third, although unshown in the film, is prepared for in the final scene and then alluded to in the final title. When Manny Balestrero visits his wife in the sanatorium and discovers that she is still mad, despite the fact that his innocence has been established, he says to a nurse, 'I guess I was hoping for a miracle', and the nurse replies, 'They happen. But it takes time.' Shortly afterwards, a title appears on the screen: 'Two years later, Rose Balestrero walked out of the

3 François Truffaut 'Un trousseau de fausses clés' *Les Cahiers du cinéma* vol. 7 no. 39 (1954) pp. 45–52. Translated as 'Skeleton keys' in *Cahiers du cinéma in English* no. 2 (1966) pp. 60–66.

4 Godard *The Wrong Man* p. 51.

5 François Truffaut with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott *Hitchcock* (London: Paladin 1986) p. 366.

6 Godard *The Wrong Man* p. 51.

7 Godard 'Strangers on a Train' in Milne (ed.) *Godard by Godard* pp. 22–6. Originally published in *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 10 (1952).

8 Godard 'What is cinema?' in Milne (ed.) *Godard by Godard* pp. 30–31. 31. Originally published in *Les Amis du cinéma* no. 1 (1952).

9 Godard *The Man Who Knew Too Much* in Milne (ed.) *Godard on Godard* pp. 36–9. 37. Originally published in *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 64 (1956).

10 Godard *The Wrong Man* p. 52.

sanatorium – completely cured. Today she lives happily in Florida with Manny and the two boys . . . and what happened seems like a nightmare to them – but it did happen.’ Then, before the end title, there is a final dissolve to the family seen in extreme long shot on a sunny street in Florida. As Godard says at the end of ‘Le cinéma et son double’, ‘Draw your own conclusion’.<sup>11</sup>

11 Ibid. p. 55

But it is worth pointing out that Hitchcock describes none of these three events as miracles in his conversation with Truffaut. He makes no allusion to the first event, describes the second not as a miracle but as an ‘ironic coincidence’,<sup>12</sup> and when it comes to the third, he significantly misremembers the conclusion of his own film, after noting that ‘[Balestrero’s] wife lost her mind and was put in an insane asylum’, he adds, ‘She’s probably still there’.<sup>13</sup> In defence of Hitchcock it could be said that emotionally and dramaturgically, this is the way we all tend to remember the film, because the sense of hopelessness that pervades the narrative is so unrelenting that the film’s postscript about the story’s aftermath makes a relatively small impression on us. (In conversation, James Naremore described *The Wrong Man* to me as the most depressing commercial film in American cinema, and I think he may be right.)

12 Truffaut *Hitchcock* p. 368

13 Ibid. p. 356

Let me now turn briefly to the true story of Balestrero as recounted in an article by Marshall Deutelbaum, ‘Finding the right man in *The Wrong Man*’.<sup>14</sup> Basing much of his research on the *Life* magazine news story by Herbert Brean, ‘A case of identity’ (29 June 1953) which inspired Hitchcock’s film – as well as on a one-hour television dramatization with the same title broadcast on *Robert Montgomery Presents* on 11 January 1954 (about two years before *The Wrong Man* went into production) – Deutelbaum shows in detail that ‘while *The Wrong Man* retains the general details of Balestrero’s arrest and trial, as well as the details of Rose’s breakdown, the weak points of the police investigation, the ease with which Balestrero was able to establish his alibis, and the effectiveness of his attorney have been eliminated from the screenplay’.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the scene described by Godard and Truffaut as a ‘miracle’ was Hitchcock’s invention: ‘Though Balestrero was a religious man and prayed at his trial. . . [he] was not praying, but playing in the Stork Club band at the time of [the real robber’s] arrest’. Another discovery Deutelbaum makes, this one purely textual, is that the *vrai coupable* is seen crossing paths with Balestrero at least three times in the film prior to the staged miracle, Balestrero even bumps into him on his way to the insurance office where he is initially falsely identified as the robber.

14 Included in Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Pogue (eds), *A Hitchcock Reader* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1986), pp. 207–18.

15 Ibid. p. 209

What all these discoveries suggest is that Hitchcock’s metaphysical suppositions about the meaning of the story provided a filter for his documentary rigour, thereby shaping the narrative and even, one could argue, inflecting its documentary verisimilitude. The best defence of this approach is ironically furnished by Bazin:

16 André Bazin in François Truffaut  
ed. Jean Renoir trans. W.  
Halsey and W. Simon (New York:  
Simon & Schuster 1973) p. 85

Good cinema is necessarily, in one way or another, more realistic than bad cinema. But simply being realistic is not enough to make a film good. There is no point in rendering something realistically unless it is to make it more meaningful in an abstract sense. In this paradox lies the progress of the movies.<sup>16</sup>

Insofar as Godard's films and videos better illustrate this maxim than any of Truffaut's films, one could argue that Godard eventually proved to be the more Bazinian of the two, in his practice as well as his theory.

I do not feel qualified to discuss what it means to be French-Swiss Protestant in a French Catholic milieu, but I would like to suggest that the French Catholic cinephilia of *Les Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s partly involved seeing directors as if they were priests. In connection with this, I have always suspected that Bazin's taste for the low camera angles and ceilings in early Welles corresponded in part to the vantage point of someone praying. Similarly, the notions of destiny and fatality associated with Murnau, Lang and Hitchcock had a particular Catholic inflection, and I suspect that part of what Godard brought to this metaphysics was a certain existential restlessness, combined with a romantic view of politics and a passion for dialectics. In effect, Godard adopted an Eisensteinian view of Hitchcock, a preference for montage over *mise-en-scène*, and in many respects his view of Hitchcock in the 1990s sustains this. Even if Eisenstein never became a *poète maudit* for the masses in the way that Hitchcock did, one could certainly argue that what one forgets in *Potemkin* are personal motivations and plot details, and what one remembers are a pair of broken spectacles, a baby carriage and a series of stone lions.

How does this view of Hitchcock become translated into social criticism? Problematically at best. In an oblique fashion Hitchcock's fear of the police implies a distrust of the established order, something one clearly also finds in Godard's work. Yet paradoxically, by the time Godard makes *La Chinoise* (1967), the notion of the *faux coupable* becomes transformed into the man accidentally killed by Véronique, a Maoist terrorist, instead of her intended target – a character whom she subsequently kills when she returns to the same apartment to correct her mistake. Moreover, this innocent victim is pushed so far into the margins of *La Chinoise* that we never see his face – in contrast to Balestrero, whose face occupies the emotional centre of *The Wrong Man* and becomes a central reference point in 'Le cinéma et son double'. I quote again from Godard's review:

The beauty of each of these closeups, with their searching attention to the passage of time, comes from the sense that

necessity is intruding on triviality, essence on existence. The beauty of Henry Fonda's face during this extraordinary second which becomes interminable is comparable to that of the young Alcibiades described by Plato in *The Banquet*. Its only criterion is the exact truth. We are watching the most fantastic of adventures because we are watching the most perfect, the most exemplary, of documentaries<sup>17</sup>

17 Godard *The Wrong Man* p. 49

Of course, in *The Wrong Man*, Godard is identifying more with Hitchcock than with Balestrero, and much of the lasting value of *La Chinoise*, widely misunderstood at the time of its release, is its relative objectivity towards its Maoist characters, its refusal to take sides. But I think that what Godard is mapping out in this description of Fonda's face, as Annette Michelson has suggested, is the notion of fiction and documentary forming a continuum, which would inform his subsequent films politically as well as aesthetically<sup>18</sup> (The political implications of this continuum are fully apparent in the contemporary social criticism of *Alphaville* [1965], for example. By using existing Parisian locations to represent the future in a distant galaxy, Godard created an allegory about France in 1965 that is full of specific, as well as more general, social criticism, altering the possibilities of science-fiction films in the process.)

18 Annette Michelson Foreword  
in Milne (ed.) *Godard by Godard*  
p. viii

In other respects, it is more difficult to see Godard functioning as a social critic while writing about Hitchcock, partly because it is debatable whether Hitchcock himself can be regarded as a social critic. The same thing could be said about Kafka insofar as a metaphysical reading of the work of either artist tends to rule out social criticism, and metaphysical criticism is what Godard and most of his colleagues at *Les Cahiers du cinéma* specialized in. But recalling the suggestion of Joseph McBride that *The Wrong Man* constitutes a better adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial* than Welles's more literal adaptation, I think it could be argued that Kafka's novel and Hitchcock's film both offer powerful social critiques of bureaucracy, and some aspects of these critiques, or their equivalents, can be found in Godard's subsequent films.<sup>19</sup>

19 Joseph McBride *Orson Welles*  
(New York: Da Capo, 1996)  
pp. 157-8

In conclusion, I have to confess that I do not agree with Godard that Hitchcock was 'le seul avec Dreyer qui a su filmer un miracle', a compliment that takes too much credit away from Vigo and Buñuel, among others, not to mention Rossellini. Since I do not regard Dreyer's cinema as at all religious in many fundamental respects – for me his cinema represents not belief but challenges to beliefs, including, paradoxically, the beliefs of atheists – I have a lot of trouble connecting his materialism with Hitchcock's metaphysics.

But of course it is difficult to disagree about miracles unless one can agree on what constitutes a miracle. I can accept the premiss that the first official appearance of the *vrai coupable* in Hitchcock's film,

superimposed over the features of Balestrero, represents a miracle in relation to the struggles of French Hitchcock criticism in the 1950s because it furnishes a vindication and validation of what Truffaut, Chabrol, Rohmer, Godard and others had been writing about for years about the double and the transference of guilt in Hitchcock's films. This is why Truffaut could write in 1957 that 'This is certainly the most beautiful shot in Hitchcock's work and it summarizes all of it'.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps for the same reason, Truffaut's review of *The Wrong Man* concludes that 'it is probably his best film, the one that goes farthest in the direction he chose so long ago'.<sup>21</sup> Less than a decade later, while interviewing Hitchcock after himself becoming a successful director, he viewed the film more sceptically, regarding it mainly as a failure and saying to Hitchcock by way of explanation, 'You've convinced me that the best Hitchcock films are the ones that are most popular with the audience'<sup>22</sup> – a criterion that incidentally also rules out *Vertigo* (1958), the film Hitchcock made just after *The Wrong Man*. Earlier in the same interview, Truffaut explains that he thinks Hitchcock's style, 'which has found its perfection in the fiction area, happens to be in total conflict with the aesthetics of the documentary and that contradiction is apparent throughout the picture'.<sup>23</sup> The same contradiction, I would add, helped to create the dialectical force of Godard's style as a filmmaker, and made much of its social criticism possible.

<sup>20</sup> François Truffaut *The Films of My Life* trans. Leonard Mayhew (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975) p. 86

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Truffaut *Hitchcock* p. 366

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 362



# The Nutty Professor: teaching film with Jean-Luc Godard

MICHAEL TEMPLE

As a teacher of French and a teacher of Film, I am conscious of the fact that Jean-Luc Godard exerts an indirect, but very powerful, influence over the way I think about cinema in general and French cinema in particular. Given that Godard has just completed his very ambitious *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, I find myself posing a series of semi-theoretical, semi-pedagogical questions: could I envisage teaching *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as a set text, could I envisage using *Histoire(s) du cinéma* to teach film history; and even if I considered the double boxed-set of four videos and four art books as a little heavy to carry with me into the classroom, how might the spirit of the 'late Godard' inform my teaching? What kind of role or presence might Godard the film historian usefully occupy there? What sort of influence or pressure might he exert? These are the issues I shall briefly discuss in this essay.

Given the current availability of a significant number of journalistic and academic articles, in French and in English, describing the evolution, structure and ambition of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, I shall not rehearse these basic facts and hypotheses here. Indeed one could say that the first phase of interest in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, marked by a curiosity for a project which did not yet exist, and which might never have fully existed, has now come to an end. With the appearance of the finished work that time is over, and we have entered a second, more critical phase, in which commentary, interpretation, contestation and, one hopes, inspiration will each find their voice. However, there are two points I should like to signal at this transitional stage. Firstly, it is important to note – especially for

those mainly familiar with Godard's 1960s film work and 1970s video work – that we are dealing, both materially and thematically, with a new figure of Jean-Luc Godard, or at least we are adding a significant new layer, or a fresh angle, to that mass of intellectual and artistic contradictions which film culture has come to recognize by the initials *JLG*. Secondly, this most recent manifestation of Godard as historian of cinema implies retrospectively a reconfiguration of the whole Godardian corpus and myth – in particular, of the less well-known films and videos that have accompanied the elaboration of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* since the late 1980s. One can now see throughout that period the gradual and intermittent emergence of Godard the historian and storyteller, who himself perceives this new role as a kind of personal and artistic milestone. Or, to use his own terms:

Quand j'étais petit, on me disait: raconte pas d'histoires! Après, au cinéma, on m'a dit: raconte des histoires! Eh bien voilà, j'ai trouvé ma façon à moi de raconter des histoires.<sup>1</sup>

(When I was little, I was told: Don't tell stories! Later, in the movies, I was told: You must tell stories! So now, with *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, I have found my own way of telling stories.)

What I want to suggest here is that this necessary reassessment may indirectly reveal a Godard who, albeit as the Nutty Professor, could be due to re-emerge from the dubious marginality of self-exile and/or public neglect, and come to occupy a more central symbolic role in the philosophy and pedagogy of the moving image.

So what do I mean by the Nutty Professor? Why choose this comical figure to convey how I feel Jean-Luc Godard might inform our thinking about and teaching of film and media? Firstly, the Nutty Professor, as we know from Jerry Lewis and Eddie Murphy,<sup>2</sup> is a reworking of the Jekyll and Hyde story, which itself reworks the mythological deep-structure of the Double. The Self recognizes itself by recognizing the Other, and at the same time destroys itself by failing to recognize the necessary failure of such a recognition. In other words, schizophrenia is as much a part of Being and Thinking as is the Cartesian *cogito* or the Socratic interrogation. In the classroom and in our research, likewise, it is part of our vocation to be schizophrenic, or at least to recognize that such a split is written into our mission; for example, to entertain and inform, to combine the sweet and the useful, to ask the question that no-one wants to answer and refuse the answer when no-one wants to ask. None of us is, I hope, as unbearably cool and seductively knowing as Buddy Love, nor as twitchily nerdy and roundly uncool as are respectively Julius Kelp and Sherman Klump. But we are all Nutty Professors, whether we like it or not. The Jean-Luc Godard I am invoking here, whose perverse and tutelary presence is always beside me whenever I think or speak of cinema, is certainly split, symbolically, between

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Godard: Ne raconte pas d'histoires in Alain Bergala (ed.) *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* Volume II 1984–98 (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma 1998) pp. 224–5.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis starred in and directed the original 1963 version of the *The Nutty Professor*. Murphy took the role in the 1996 version directed by Tom Shadyac. Both films tell the story of an professor (Lewis as socially awkward Julius Kelp, Murphy as overweight Sherman Klump) who attempts to impress a young woman by chemically transforming himself into a physically more attractive and confident alter ego: Buddy Love, who unfortunately has a less pleasant personality. The professor becomes unable to control which self has the upper hand.

the supremely seductive and the cringingly awful, the sorcerer's apprentice and the absolute master. Contradiction, transgression, auto-critique, negation, self-abuse, paradox, masochism, humour – any or all of these terms would find their way into an intelligent account of Godard's works and words through the last four decades of film culture. Certainly, the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* project itself is riven with some familiar dichotomies: whether it be sound *slash* image, film *slash* text, TV *slash* cinema, silents *slash* talkies, and so on, that *slash* always marks a conflictual and creative dynamic which implies relations of complementarity and antithesis, supplementarity and subversion, irony and the sublime. Only a mad scientist could dream up the grandiose nature of the project's declared ambitions – namely to tell *toutes les histoires* (all the stories) of cinema's history and cinema's century whilst remaining true to *une histoire seule* (only one story) of what *seul le cinéma* (cinema alone) could experience and express, what cinema alone could record, process and project. The very notion of being at once inside and outside cinema's history, of speaking its essence from a distance, is profoundly schizophrenic – and yet is thereby totally normal, and normally pedagogical, reflecting as it does a double act we perform almost daily, at work, between our various formalisms and various historicisms, between something like a narrative and something like a theory.

So what theoretical lessons can be drawn from recounting the story of Jean-Luc Godard as the Nutty Professor? For the purposes of this essay, I will suggest that there are two sides to being Nutty and two sides to being Professor. These can be expressed under the four quite uncategorical headings of 'genius', 'idiot', 'pedagogue', and 'scientist'. Equally, we can formulate the four following questions, 'Is Godard a genius?', 'Is Godard an idiot?', 'Is Godard a pedagogue?', and, finally, 'Is Godard a scientist?'.

Firstly, is Godard a genius? To my understanding, to be a genius, in any art form, is to function at once as the exception and the example. By being different, unique, unrepeatable, seemingly beyond the rules of the game, the exceptional artist confirms the norms and conventions by which we recognize an art form and explain or represent it to ourselves. In cinema, this is sometimes known as auteur theory. Or rather, it would be possible to rethink what we call auteur theory in these terms. When we construct a working model of the 'signature', for example, of Jean Vigo, Jean Renoir or Robert Bresson, this is based on the very credible fiction that these figures are unique artists in total expressive control of the merest camera movement or play of light, and that each image is a motif, each touch a thought. The absolute instance of this is Hitchcock, as Godard himself shows in Chapter 4A of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, significantly entitled 'Le Contrôle de l'univers' ('The Control of the Universe'). From a pedagogical viewpoint, this fiction is immensely productive, insofar as it enables us to think through a whole range of

technical, formal, representational and narrative elements, which are of course the very basis of what we understand by cinema in the first place. Not only does Godard clearly constitute just such an exemplary exception, he also embodies – in what I call the ‘mythical’ as opposed to the ‘modular’ dimension of auteur theory – a further key feature of the cinematic genius. This is to be symbolically in touch with the imagined origins and abiding spirit of the art form; to be its genie, as well as one of its great individual manifestations. Mere chronology tells us that this perceived link to the beginnings of cinema, to the magical cinematograph itself, will become distinctly less tenable – or more wilfully fantasized – with the passage of historical time into what is already the second century of cinema. From his highly idiosyncratic position as film historian, who sees, therefore, the beginning and the end of cinema, its invention and its death, Godard can just about get away with claiming, for example, that he was born with the cinema and therefore it will die with him, at the end of his and its natural term. But this clearly has less to do with real dates and times than it does with his symbolic presence as the last of the auteurs, as the last filmmaker to remember who Lumière and Méliès were, and what they might still represent. This seamless interweaving of the personal and the impersonal, of the work and the name, clearly recalls what film theorists in a different context have analyzed as ‘stardom’, and it seems to me that in such a light, Godard as genie and genius provides us with the ideal opportunity to reconsider, and indeed revitalize, the teaching of film as art, in which films would be the ‘signatures’ of its grand masters, and stars its privileged and most mysterious models.

The flipside of the genius is the idiot. Here the exceptionality of the genius veers off the recordable scale into an extreme marginality of incomprehension, isolation and exile. In terms of the auteur myth, this is the cinema’s equivalent of the *poète maudit*, the artist as exemplary victim. Offscreen, the perfect illustration of this myth is Jean Vigo; onscreen, it is perhaps Jean Cocteau’s constant reprojection of the Orpheus legend. In my argument, the poet or artist becomes an idiot in several senses. An idiot is literally one who is so extremely private, so extremely individual and so true to himself, that no recognizably public role exists for him other than marginal victim or madman. This is why we talk about ‘idiolect’ and ‘idiosyncrasy’, in other words a private language and unique blend of elements which deprive the subject of any interlocutor other than himself. It is clear that Godard has long been associated with such a form of idiocy. The style or signature of the artist no longer confirms the rules of the game, it actually takes the game to a place where nobody else has yet gone, or where nobody else wants to go. We recognize aspects, we admire fragments, and we think we see something unimaginably fine. But the artist is forever positioned up

ahead, as a sublime mirage of art on the horizon, still to come. Or he seems lost, in a virtual past that was never actually realized. In Godard's case, the idiosyncrasy is exaggerated by such a high level of reference and quotation, of self-reference and self-quotation, that at times only a few – perhaps an unhappy few – can find the courage to follow. The lucidity of Godard in respect of his idiocy, however, retrieves to some extent that lost communication. Since the 1980s he has increasingly chosen to project himself into his work precisely as a type of idiot. Schematically, one could argue that a certain 'tragic' image of Godard was appropriately killed off at the end of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)/Every Man for Himself* (aka *Slow Motion*) in 1979, when Jacques Dutronc as Paul Godard is run over by a car, and his wife and daughter look at him curiously, before declaring that 'cela ne nous regarde plus' ('that no longer concerns us', literally 'that no longer looks at us'). What emerges in the 1980s, with *Prénom Carmen/First Name. Carmen* (1983), *King Lear* (1987), and *Soigne ta droite/Keep up Your Right* (1987), for example, is a newly comical, slapstick character called variously 'Uncle Jean', 'Professor Pluggy', or quite simply 'the Idiot'. This character is embodied by Godard himself, who plays on the physical processes of ageing, and shows us his idiot stumbling, fumbling and mumbling across the screen in a manner which subverts the grandeur of the sublime and punctures its mirage of future unspeakable beauty. The sublime becomes a sub-idiolect, and the ineffable merely inaudible. Crucially, for my purposes, it is only in the light of the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* that this figure of the inaudible soothsayer finds its most effective strategic position. How can a non-speaker, a babbler and a stutterer, seriously assume the mantle of supreme storyteller and profess to find the words that will forge our messy collective and private experiences of Time into the order and meaning of History? At this point the weakness of Godard, the idiosyncrasy, suddenly looks more like an attraction than a flaw. The extreme subjectivity of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, its sensory excess to the point of nonsense, appears preferable to the kind of totalitarian rationality which, at some level, is always written into the historicizing urge, with its dreadful desire for harmony and sense. So we now see with some relief that 'all the histories' of cinema are in fact 'all his stories', and 'only one story' is in fact 'only his story'. The idiosyncrasy of mixing *Le Mépris/Contempt* (1963), *Week-end* (1967) and *Soigne ta droite* with *Die Nibelungen – Siegfrieds Tod/The Death of Siegfried* (1924), *La Règle du jeu/The Rules of the Game* (1939), and *A Place in the Sun* (1951) no doubt helps to characterize *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as, from one perspective, 'a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing'.<sup>3</sup> But the project's capacity at times both to 'signify nothing' and to signify 'too much' communicates effectively, to me at least, two clear warnings or lessons regarding history and cinema; namely that

3 William Shakespeare *Macbeth*  
Act 5 Scene 5

'excess' and 'nothingness' can at times operate as essential instruments for thinking and teaching, and as vitally perverse forces in the making of history and the making of sense

I shall now turn to the second half of my equation – that is, the 'Professor' expressed as teacher and researcher – and to my questions, again understood in the context of the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* project, 'Is Godard a pedagogue?' and 'Is Godard a scientist?' Given my comments on genius and idiocy, marginality and excess, the chances of Godard being hired as a jobbing academic are probably quite slim. We need to be conscious, however, of the fact that Godard has always harboured very serious pedagogical ambitions, of which *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is the latest and most complete expression. From the earliest days, Godard has played with the idea of instruction, either in the sense of making films which teach us about cinema, or with a more generally didactic, even moralizing, purpose. In a cinematic perspective, this didactic ambition has found expression in what Godard has consistently identified as the documentary or 'Lumière' side of cinema's mission, its capacity to record evidence and provide the forensic materials for what Godard often refers to in legal terms as a 'trial' or 'justice'. Clearly, however, the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* project at this stage looks like the closest Godard has ever got to explicitly engaging in pedagogy, and in this regard it is worth noting that the origins of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* can be found in the late 1970s, when Godard briefly taught an 'introduction to the veritable history of cinema and television' at the film school in Montreal, employing a formal structure not dissimilar to that which we see in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* itself. Indeed, one should add that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the elaboration of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard also came very close to establishing a research centre within the French national film school, the Fondation Européenne des Métiers de l'Image et du Son (FEMIS). This genuine pedagogical ambition is also reflected in the extraordinary number of interviews Godard has given over the last ten years explaining and exposing *Histoire(s) du cinéma* to a very diverse public. The most famous and informative of these is no doubt the dialogue with Serge Daney published in *Libération* in 1988,<sup>4</sup> an interview which Godard himself later incorporated into Chapters 2A and 4B of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Moreover, let there be no doubt that, in straightforwardly positivistic terms, there is an enormous amount to be learnt from *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, as teachers of the moving image will, one hopes, begin to realize in the coming years. Students could indeed do far worse than to work their way through the dense, intense wealth of materials that Godard packs into each episode, as well as the extraordinary range of editing techniques, old and new, that he draws on to construct his kaleidoscopic super-montage. Equally, the dominant theses of the work – regarding the invention of cinema, the coming of sound, the

4 Godard fait des histoires  
interview with Serge Daney  
*Libération* 26 December 1988  
pp. 24–7

dominance of Hollywood, the coeval rise of Fascism and Communism, the failure to represent the Holocaust, the Italian renaissance of postwar Neorealism, the second coming of the New Wave, and so on – would all present perfectly workable themes for study and discussion in any film course with a historical remit. Lastly, perhaps, the advent of digital technology and the arrival of film materials online potentially open up the prospect of millions of minor Professor Pluggys making millions of minor *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. In which case, as pedagogues, we would all have to learn some new scientific tricks, and might well go mad in the process.

My final question concerns Godard as scientist, mad or otherwise, and here I am really thinking of the French term *chercheur* – one who seeks, who searches, who ‘does research’, as we say. The scientific analogy has been present in Godard’s films and theoretical discourse since early days of *Vivre sa vie* (1962) and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle* (1966). In an amazingly lucid interview given to *Les Cahiers du cinéma* in 1962,<sup>5</sup> Godard announces some of the central metaphors which will characterize his filmmaking for the next forty years: research, curiosity, invention, enquiry and, perhaps most suggestively, ‘essay’. Indeed he has never really lost that sense of cinema as a scientific enquiry (predominantly sociological and anthropological) into the contemporary world, capable both of recording and revealing unseen aspects of reality (in this regard Godard is much more Bazinian than is often imagined) and of redefining the ways in which we process and interpret the findings of that investigation. With *Histoire(s) du cinéma* that scientific, experimental curiosity has been newly focused on the archives of cinema, its traces, patterns and omissions. But whereas a normal scientist would express his findings in the cold, Cartesian rhythms of expository prose, Godard has, of course, made an irreversible commitment to respect the specificity of sound and image and to enable them to tell their own story through their own unique means. As spectators of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, therefore, we witness results of the tests in process, rather than read the final report. In fact, the most appropriate term would probably be the ‘essay’, insofar as it perfectly combines elements of artistic invention and scientific enquiry. Inevitably reminiscent of Michel de Montaigne,<sup>6</sup> the essay is both a testing, an experimentation, a provisional and improvised probing of the unknown universe, and the innovative, flexible, reflective working through of formal, almost artisanal problems. How can I do this, how can I do this better or differently, what if I did this; what comes next, what shall I do next? (Thus the image of Anna Karina in *Pierrot le fou* [1965] walking along the beach repeating the phrase ‘Qu’est-ce que je vais faire?’ ‘Je sais pas quoi faire!’ [‘What shall I do? I don’t know what to do!’] expresses an epistemological problem as well as profound existential boredom.) Both the scientific and artistic aspects of the essay reflect an

5 Jean-Luc Godard interview with Jean Collet et al. *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 138 (Nouvelle Vague special issue (1962)) pp. 20–39. Anthologized in Alain Bergala (ed.) *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/Éditions de l’étoile, 1985) pp. 9–24.

6 Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) a French philosopher whose major work is *The Essays*.

experimental method which is never afraid to rip up work-in-progress and start all over again, to sacrifice the beloved art object, even the art form itself, for the sake of the grander hypothetical project. Like Montaigne or Marcel Proust, Godard never hesitates to take the knife to his own work, redeploying his materials and reconsidering his methods from zero. Indeed, he invariably refers to his actual films as at best *tentatives* (attempts) and at worst *échecs* (failures), the latter term serving throughout his career as a constant counterpoint to the notion of the 'essay'. It is ultimately this double curiosity, this reflective and exploratory spirit of enquiry, which most powerfully suggests to me that my Godardian Nutty Professor can serve as an effective pedagogical and philosophical model for teachers and researchers alike. Although excess, perversity, obduracy and contrariness may not at present feature in any Higher Education Funding Council directive or Quality Assurance manual, it is my claim here that not only should these vices be appreciated for their potential virtues, but that they are in fact the necessary complements to curiosity and reflection in a culture of change and exchange.



# The death(s) of cinema according to Godard

MICHAEL WITT

'The cinema is dead' On the face of it, neither a very clever nor original thing to say. On the contrary, in the context of the diversity and sheer *quantity* of films currently being made worldwide, such a claim seems vague, unilluminating and, frankly, rather silly. Yet highly influential. Pronouncements of the 'death of cinema' have permeated popular discourses on film. Partly, I suggest, this is due to the impact of Godard's insistence on the 'death' of cinema on critics generally, and the infiltration of these ideas in watered-down form (often virtually unrecognizable) into journalistic discourses where they fit comfortably into the *fin de siècle* zeitgeist.

My aim here is to demonstrate that when Godard talks of the 'death' of cinema he is in fact invoking a series of quite distinct 'deaths', and that in order to criticize or discuss this discourse we must first unravel and make explicit just what is at stake in each. Secondly, I will seek to explore the logic and parameters to one of these 'deaths' – which results in the apparently sweeping dismissal of virtually all contemporary film production – in an attempt to clarify the complexities of the issues obscured by the homogenizing process to which this polemic has been subjected. In the light of this untangling of the successive death(s) of cinema according to Godard, I will suggest briefly how it might inform a re-reading of the Godardian *oeuvre*.

## The 'body' of cinema

To claim that the cinema can die assumes that it is, or was, 'alive'. Cinema, an industrial art form, is thus inherently romanticized and accorded a 'life'. More than this, the cinema is given form, indeed given a human body and life cycle – as Susan Sontag puts it, appropriating and repeating this facet of Godard's critique, cinema appears to have traversed 'an inevitable birth, the steady accumulation of glories and the onset in the last decade of an ignominious, irreversible decline'.<sup>1</sup> Godard has frequently given cinema human attributes in this way. By the time that he can state simply in *Deux fois cinquante ans de cinéma français* / *2 × 50 Years of French Cinema* (1995) that 'il était mortel, le cinéma' ('the cinema was mortal'), the idea has become familiar through its frequent appearance in interviews across the preceding decade. What is more, Godard is an old hand at giving cinema a body. Fritz Lang, we recall, embodied classical cinema in *Le Mépris/Contempt* (1963), a metaphor extended into the seminal filmed dialogue between Godard and Lang shot shortly after the film's completion, *Le Dinosaur et le bébé* / *The Dinosaur and the Baby*.<sup>2</sup> More recently, it is Eddie Constantine, the space-age private eye (Lemmy Caution) from *Alphaville* (1965), whose ageing and ill body was called upon to represent 'cinema' at the beginning of the 1990s, stumbling through the former East Germany in *Allemagne année 90 neuf zéro* / *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* (1991). Constantine died two years later.

A further twist in this body/cinema metaphor is Godard's identification of his own ageing body with the death of cinema, premised on his long-standing self-dissolution into 'cinema', as in the 'Jean-Luc Cinema Godard' intertitle that frames *Bande à part* / *Band of Outsiders* (1964). If Godard, in a gesture as self-promotional and narcissistic as it is – paradoxically, touching and self-effacing – has repeatedly suggested that the cinema is likely to die more or less when he does ('), then he has, for a good ten or fifteen years, exploited his own body and its physical ageing as illustrative and exemplary of the winding down of cinema as an art form.

A mes yeux, le crépuscule est porteur d'espoir plutôt que de désespoir. Je commence à trouver quelque chose de beau et de très humain dans le cinéma qui me donne envie d'en faire jusqu'à ma mort. Et je pense que je mourrai probablement en même temps que le cinéma, tel qu'il s'est inventé. . . L'existence du cinéma ne peut excéder, à peu près, la durée d'une vie humaine entre quatre-vingts et cent vingt ans. C'est quelque chose qui aura été passager, éphémère.<sup>3</sup>

(To my eyes, twilight is the bearer of hope rather than of despair. I'm beginning to find something beautiful and very human in the

1 Susan Sontag, 'The decay of cinema', *New York Times* 25 February 1996, pp. 60–61.

2 Directed by André S. Labarthe in 1964 for the *Cineastes de notre temps* television series, produced by Labarthe and Janine Bazin.

3 Godard, quoted on the final (unnumbered) page of Alain Philippon, Gilles Laprevotte and Jean-François Egéa (eds), *Made in Godard: Années 70/80 de 1972 à 1987. L'Œuvre de Jean-Luc Godard* (Amiens: Maison de la Culture d'Amiens, 1987). As with almost all the interviews quoted here, unless the publication cited has appeared in English, the translations are mine.

cinema, which makes me want to go on making films until I die  
And I think that I'll probably die at the same time as the cinema,  
such as it was invented ... The existence of the cinema can't  
exceed, roughly, the length of a human life: between eighty and  
120 years. It's something that will have been transitory,  
ephemeral )

The cinema experiences a number of deaths in Godard's schema,  
and indeed the very notion of 'cinema' undergoes a series of  
mutations. I have explored the 'cinemas' set in motion by Godard in  
and around *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998) elsewhere, so I will  
confine myself here to a summary of these models of 'cinema'  
before focusing on the successive 'deaths' to which they are  
subjected.<sup>4</sup>

For Godard, as critical cinema historian, cinema is, above all, a  
collaborative, industrial, popular art form, indeed the only true art  
form to have been instantly and massively popular. (This emphasis  
on the popular, incidentally, results in the remarkable, almost  
wholesale, exclusion of experimental film and the avant garde from  
*Histoire(s)*.) Against this backdrop, true 'cinema' only exists in a  
Godardian perspective in the context of specific periods in the history  
of a handful of national cinemas, always directly linked to the need  
and quest for a national self-image, one which engenders a  
revolution in film language. Thus, very rapidly, Godard's true  
'cinemas' are post-Revolution Russian cinema, German  
Expressionism, Italian Neorealism and Hollywood, to which the  
Nouvelle Vague is added as an awkward appendage.

### Death(s)

To postulate the death of cinema is hardly new. Views of cinema as  
in terminal decline have accompanied the evolution of cinema  
history, with commentators pointing to crises in the cinema as early  
as the 1910s. If we are to believe Godard and other proponents of  
the 'deaths' of cinema (Godard engages with almost all the other  
models, indeed, as we shall see, with each of them simultaneously),  
the cinema has died, died and died again.

Death Number One is the suppression of the blaze of exploratory  
vitality of silent cinema by the 'talkies'. Silent cinema has long been  
idealized in Godard's work, often cast as a brilliant child subjected  
to the normalizing dictates of the script/dialogue/text (against which  
Godard has railed for the past thirty years), a child consequently  
stunted and prevented from developing normally: 'Le cinéma s'est  
arrêté dans les années 20 avec le muet'<sup>5</sup> ('Cinema stopped in the  
1920s with silent film'). Silent cinema, often identified through the  
term *cinématographe* by Godard, functions as a nostalgic image of a

4 In a paper entitled 'Qu'était ce  
que le cinéma? Jean-Luc Godard?'  
(What was cinema? Jean-Luc  
Godard?) delivered at the  
international conference on  
Visual Culture and French  
National Identity at the University  
of Stirling in June 1997. To be  
published in Elizabeth Ezra and  
Susan Harris (eds), *Visual Culture  
and French National Identity*  
(Oxford: Berg, forthcoming 2000).

5 Godard in Jean-Luc Godard, *La  
France: reste à l'avant-garde  
de la régression* (interview with  
Frédéric Ferney), *Le Monde* 11  
December 1990, p. 29.

6 Stephen Heath *Questions of Cinema* (London: Macmillan 1981) pp 90–91

7 Pierre Leprohon *Histoire du cinéma muet: vie et mort du cinématographe (1895–1930)* (Paris: Éditions d'Aujourd'hui 1982)

period of unsullied innovation and experimentation before language, in its dual guise of the written script and of the filtering through of the aesthetic limitations ushered in by the introduction of sound recording, combined to produce the enduring codes of classical film narrative and its derivatives. After this facet of Godard's polemic had emerged towards the end of the 1960s, Stephen Heath rightly sought to contest the idealized vision it contained, whilst nevertheless accepting its essential truth.<sup>6</sup> It is also the key assumption on which film historian Pierre Leprohon's monumental two-part *Histoire du cinéma muet, vie et mort du cinématographe (1895–1930)* (*The History of Silent Cinema. Life and Death of the Cinematograph*) is premised, the author developing the familiar thesis that silent film 'Art' was violently usurped and replaced by another different (and inherently inferior) form of cinema.<sup>7</sup> Other than noting its existence as one of the 'deaths' engaged with by Godard, I do not intend to explore or criticize the idea any further here, other than to note that this blanket concept of the smothering of silent cinema by the talkies obscures, in a French context at least, both the economic instability of the cinema industry in France across the 1910s, and the role of the onset of World War I in hastening the crisis (with the mobilization of able-bodied Frenchmen to fight, and the shutting down of virtually all industries, the cinema included).

Death Number Two – perhaps the most unusual and original of the 'deaths' identified by Godard, and certainly the most recently elaborated – is the view of the death of cinema in the face of the horrors of the Holocaust, and the failure of the cinema to confront and work through the Nazi genocide of the Jews (which has inevitably resulted, according to Godard, in the ignominious sidelining of cinema as a vital cultural form, condemned to languish in shame, its current filmmaker representatives pale bureaucratic shadows of those elevated by Godard to his pantheon of great 'combatants' such as Eisenstein, Lang or Rossellini). If the cinema is dead, Godard's late work is a graveyard, peppered with image-tombstones of those who have 'died in action'. This idea provides one of the core theses on which *Histoire(s)* turns, and depends on another key feature of Godard's treatment of the cinema: films are read as *actualités* (news bulletins), the real news of this century (thus set in direct opposition to what Godard repeatedly derides as the repetitive drivel of television news). The cinema, for Godard, has fulfilled the function of visionary scientific instrument, foreseeing patterns of emergent social change before they occur, and then confronting and testifying to the reality and/or atrocity of those events.

This thesis constitutes a sustained strand to Godard's thought over the past twenty years, is vigorously defended in *Histoire(s)* and other related works of this period, and is the result not just of an obsessive engagement with historical documents and writing on film and

cultural history, but also of extensive archival research on films themselves. What is more, we are now seeing the boomerang impact of Godard's research for *Histoire(s)* on his ongoing practice. If many of Godard's films of the past ten years can be read as appendices or notes to *Histoire(s)* (*Allemagne année 90 neuf zéro*, *Les Enfants jouent à la Russie* (1993), *Deux fois cinquante ans de cinéma français*), then a film such as *For Ever Mozart* (1996), which attempts to grapple, however ineptly, with events in Bosnia (references to the cinema of the 1930s, which Godard views as having announced World War II, pepper the film), clearly constitutes a self-conscious attempt to apply a model of cinema he has identified and enshrined in his cinema (hi)stories. It is the documentary base of cinema, of fictional cinema as much as of documentaries, that Godard identifies as having relinquished its responsibilities – the documentary is *au chômage* (on the dole), as he suggested recently<sup>8</sup> – and this is what he attempts to resist and restore through his own ongoing work. Godard, in this sense of a continued insistence on an engagement with the pressing issues of the day, has an explicitly political project. Attempts to characterize him as an apolitical hermit, as he is caricatured with regularity in the French media, are simply false, and belied by his recent powerful films for UNICEF (*L'Enfance de l'art* [1990]), Amnesty International (*Contre l'oubli* [1991]), and his direct intervention in 1997 against the *Debré* law in France, which proposed legislation to tighten laws governing immigration, simultaneously criminalizing many people who had originally entered France legally.<sup>9</sup>

Death Number Three, much vaunted, came and went quickly, the calls by the groups of filmmakers and technicians radicalized by May 68 for the jettisoning of cinema as a reactionary cultural form and purveyor of sanitized bourgeois myths and clichés. If Godard is often seen as having led the way with his call for the FIN DE CINEMA in an intertitle towards the end of *Week-end* (1967), his position is preceded and ushered in by Roger Boussinot's 1961 utopian proto-leftist call in *Le Cinéma est mort, vive le cinéma* (*The Cinema is Dead, Long Live the Cinema*) for the execution of cinema in its industrialized form.<sup>10</sup> Gérard Lenne, on the other hand, writing in the wake of May 1968, claims in *La Mort du cinéma français* (*The Death of French Cinema*) that 'The dream is over', that a certain form of cinema and the passionate cinephilia it engendered, is over and irretrievable.<sup>11</sup> Again echoing the trajectory of Godard and many other politicized filmmakers in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the task, according to Lenne, is not to mourn this death, but rather to analyze it critically and utilise it as a basis for the tentative construction of a new form of cinema.

Finally, Death Number Four – the creeping insidious degradation of visual culture through what Godard views as a televisual mutation. The Sonimage work, Godard's post-leftist collaborative project with

8 Godard in conversation with Noël Simsolo on *A voix nue* (radio interview) France Culture April 1998

9 See Godard, Anne Marie Mieville and Stanislas Norday 'Sans papiers avant qu'il ne soit trop tard' *Le Monde* 13 May 1998 pp 1–16. Filmmakers were at the forefront of the protest movement resisting the introduction of the Debré law. Godard's Mieville's and Stanislas's intervention was preceded by a call to civil disobedience in a text signed by 59 film directors published as 'Cinquante neuf réalisateurs appellent à désobéir' in *Le Monde* 12 February 1997 p 9. A large number of articles relating to this issue appeared in the French press in the Spring and Summer of 1997.

10 Roger Boussinot *Le Cinéma est mort, vive le cinéma* (Paris: Denel 1967).

11 Gérard Lenne *La Mort du cinéma: film révolution* (Paris: Cerf 1971).

- 12 Godard in *Le chemin vers la parole* (interview with Alain Bergala, Serge Daney and Serge Toubiana) *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 336 (1982) pp. 8–14, 57–66. Anthologized in Alain Bergala (ed.) *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/Éditions de l'Étoile, 1985) pp. 498–519, 504. Henceforth *Godard par Godard*.

Anne-Marie Miéville, is founded on the recognition that the principal dislocation to cultural practice, indeed to daily life, has come less from militant politics than from what Godard repeatedly dubs the 'explosion' of television, with its resultant catastrophic impact on daily life, and on cinema in particular. The recurrence of the term 'catastrophe' across his own television programmes (*René(e)*), episode 5b in *Six fois deux* (*Sur et sous la communication*) [1976] and *Soft and Hard* [1985], for instance), visually underscores this position: 'La grande défaite, qui n'est pas la nôtre, qui est celle de nos parents, ça a été la télé, un ensemble. C'est irrémédiable, c'est une mutation' ('The great defeat, which is not ours, but that of our parents, it was TV in its entirety. It's an irreversible mutation')<sup>12</sup>

In the context of the cinema/body metaphor, the cinema, having acquired human form, is open to a variety of deaths: short, sharp and violent, or slow and lingering. This final death is treated as the disintegration of an art form being eaten away from within by the proliferation of homogenized conventional (televisual) images, a polemic already at the heart of the comparatively little-known collaborative Godard/Miéville films of the mid 1970s,  *Ici et ailleurs* (1974) and *Comment ça va* (1975). This cancer metaphor may be objectionable, and certainly provocative, but it is omnipresent in Godard's and Miéville's work of this period, and has resurfaced in their films and videos at various points to the present day: the cinema image is eaten away by electronic tumours, the very bodies of the characters sometimes partially constituted by television monitors (*Ici et ailleurs* and *Numéro 2*, [1975]).

### The television mutation

Bar the 'Holocaust thesis', the other deaths have been frequently invoked across the course of this century. The 'death' reproduced with varying degrees of fidelity in popular writing on film derives directly from Death Number Four (the post-television apocalypse scenario), and it is to the terms and parameters of this death that I shall now turn in more detail. This death of cinema invokes a general notion of contemporary cinematic production as lamentably thin and, in terms of its social function, marginalized and 'occupied'. Whilst we are free to refute the grounds and pessimism of such a thesis, the notion that the power of cinema is fading, and that films have come increasingly to resemble pop videos or advertisements, is accepted in many critical quarters. Cinema, within such a logic, is 'outdated', no longer 'required' as a form of cultural representation: less films are made, less people go to the cinema, the films made are worse than they used to be, and so on.

I will approach this debate through reference to the work of two commentators on contemporary film, Susan Hayward and Sylvia

Harvey. Hayward usefully punctures many of the myths surrounding the influence of the emergence of television on cinema attendances. Taking as her point of departure conventional cinema/television oppositions and their reflection in the myth of Cain and Abel (as established on the blackboard in Godard's 1979 *Sauve qui peut (la vie)/Every Man for Himself* [aka *Slow Motion*]), she resists any such facile opposition through a careful charting of the impact on cinema attendance of the growth and deregulation of television, and goes on to demonstrate that attendance levels for cinema compare favourably with analogous figures for theatre, dance and sporting venues. As she concludes 'Cinema, may, therefore, have reached its natural plateau in terms of popularity as an electronic art form'<sup>13</sup> This assessment takes us to the heart of the debate the cinema – *the* popular twentieth-century art form, according to Godard – has been usurped and marginalized, reduced to the status of merely one in a series of proliferating electronic distractions, the power of the cinema enveloped by, and absorbed into, the great mass of the 'visual' (to employ the terminology proposed by Serge Daney).<sup>14</sup>

Hayward is right to emphasize that cinema attendance has declined, broadly stabilized and, contrary to popular misconceptions of France as some mythical 'home' of cinema, has never constituted a markedly higher percentage in relation to the population as a whole than in other countries. What her account chooses to ignore, however, is the massive increase in average television viewing time compared with time spent watching films in the cinema. A recent essay by Harvey recasts the terms of the debate and throws a revealing light on such comparative figures, in turn providing the backdrop to the demise of cinema as seen by Godard. Harvey plays down the importance of the large drop in cinema attendance from its heyday in the 1940s to the present, claiming that such concerns 'pale into insignificance' when the relative viewing times for cinema and television are compared. Through a simple comparison of the viewing figures for the two media, she demonstrates that if the number of hours 'invested' in viewing films in the cinema fell from sixty-four hours (in 1946) to four hours (in 1993) annually on average per head of the population in the UK, then the comparable 1993 figure for investment in television viewing is over 1,300 hours (or 1,000 hours in France).<sup>15</sup> This is what Godard refers to as the primary mutation. We now spend far more of our leisure time consuming television than anything else. Children, as Godard and Miéville were at pains to point out in *France Tour Détour Deux Enfants* (1977–8), now quite literally 'come to life' through television. And it is this familiarity of everyone in industrialized countries with the television image that, for Godard, has redefined the experience of being alive in the second half of the twentieth century, ensuring the irreversible death of cinema.

The 1970s Sonimage project constituted an attempt to trace via

13 Susan Hayward *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge 1993) p. 57

14 See especially Serge Daney *Devant la recrudescence des vols de sacs à main* (Lyon: Aleas 1991). Daney's running commentary on cinema in the age of television can also be traced in his books *La Rampe* [1983] (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma 1996), *Cine journal 1981–1986* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma 1986), *La Salaire du Zappeur* [1988] (Paris: POL 1993), *L'Exercice a été profitable: Monsieur* (Paris: POL 1993).

15 Sylvia Harvey 'What is cinema? the sensuous, the abstract and the political' in Christopher Williams (ed.) *Cinema: the Beginnings and the Future* (London: University of Westminster Press 1996) pp. 228–52.

16 For a discussion of Sonimage see Michael Witt 'On communication: the work of Anne Marie Mieville and Jean Luc Godard as Sonimage from 1973 to 1979' (University of Bath PhD thesis 1998)

17 Raymond Bellour '(Not) just an other filmmaker' in Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy (eds) *Jean Luc Godard Son + Image 1974-1991* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art 1992) pp 215-31 218

18 Guy Scarpetta 'Sur plusieurs plans' *Art press* (France) hors serie no 4 (December 1984 - January/February 1995) pp 42-50, 44 Reprinted in Scarpetta *L'Impureté* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle 1985) pp 133-52

19 Jacques Aumont *L'Œil Interminable: Cinéma et Peinture* (Toulouse: Seguer 1989) p 238

20 Jean Luc Godard 'The story: extraits du scénario (1979)' in *Godard par Godard* pp 418-41 440

video a route back to what a cinema in the age of television might look like.<sup>16</sup> Godard's work for (and against) television in this period constitutes a heroic attempt, virtually single-handed, to work through the implications of the rapid proliferation of television technology and its products. As Raymond Bellour has suggested, for Godard the task was

to keep his eye on the eye of the cyclone, and stay both 'on and under communication' – in other words at the heart of television, but simultaneously above and beneath it, so as to maintain his desire for cinema.<sup>17</sup>

One of Godard's principal 'findings' from this period of video research, and a concept he comes to insist on, is what we might term the conditioning of subjectivity through exposure to television. All the Sonimage works, and most overtly  *Ici et ailleurs* and *Comment ça va*, return repeatedly to the contention that television imagery is not just repetitive and conventional, but that there exists a direct causative link between such imagery and the gauzes through which we, as individuals, perceive the world ('l'alienation dans la perception en tant que telle'<sup>18</sup> ['alienation within perception itself'], as Guy Scarpetta astutely observes) Perception itself has been infiltrated and colonized by the wash of media imagery. It is in this context that we can best understand Jacques Aumont's succinct characterization of Godard's post-political project as 'un nouvel apprentissage du regard'<sup>19</sup> ('a new apprenticeship of the look'). For Godard, making films (and I suggest this is true of all of his work since the 1970s), is as much a question of avoiding and contesting the homogeneities of the 'visual' as it is of simply making more films: 'Faire de la mise-en-scène, c'est effacer'<sup>20</sup> ('to direct is to erase').

Godard expands the notion of TV imagery as a kind of cancer (*Comment ça va*) or contagious 'cultural reims' (*Meeting Woody Allen* [1987]) to include not just audiences, but himself, other directors, and all those involved in cinematic production.

*Jean-Luc Godard:* Have you the feeling that something has really changed?

*Woody Allen:* In terms of television?

*J-LG:* In terms of maybe making movies because of TV, of the way TV's accepting movies, or showing movies. . .

*WA:* It's a much smaller, petty experience. I don't think it's got any size to it, and I think it's badly hurt the cinema, certainly in the United States. I don't know about you, but it certainly has hurt the cinema here.

*J-LG:* Do you have the feeling that I have a bit, or maybe even a lot, that this TV power affects your creation? Exactly like radioactivity can have a harmful effect on your health



- 21** From the soundtrack of *Meeting Woody Allen* For the sake of clarity I have presented the mixture of French and English in this sequence (sometimes within a single sentence) as uninterrupted English and have edited out the contribution of the offscreen interpreter Annette Insdorf
- 22** Jacques Rivette: Nous ne sommes plus innocents *Gazette du cinema* no. 1 (May 1950)
- 23** See for instance Godard in *L'art a partir de la vie* nouvel entretien avec Jean Luc Godard par Alain Bergala (interview with Alain Bergala) in *Godard par Godard* pp. 9–24 16 Also Godard in *Rolle over Godard* (interview with Charles Tatum and Philippe Elhem) *Visions* no. 17 15 March 1984 pp. 5–9 9
- 24** Godard *Le chemin vers la parole* *Godard par Godard* p. 517 Godard made many analogous comments in his series of Montreal lectures in the late 1970s See for instance Jean Luc Godard *Introduction à une Véritable Histoire du Cinéma* (Paris Albatros 1980) p. 79

- 25** Cf. Godard's comments on *Detective* (1984) as 'un film tourné sous l'Occupation – du cinéma par la Télévision et les Magazines en tous genres (a film shot under the Occupation – of cinema by television and all types of magazines)' Jean Luc Godard *Lettres écrites pendant le tournage de Detective et non envoyées à leurs destinataires* (1984–85) in *Godard par Godard* pp. 613–17 613

WA: You mean the actual .

J-LG: The explosion of TV. Maybe you can look at it as radioactivity. So how many reims, cultural reims. I think I receive too many cultural reims from TV.

WA: Too much intake of. .

J-LG: Yes. And that it affects, it has affected my creative potential. Do you have any of this feeling at all?

J-LG: For example, the shots (the idea of which I like very much in *Hannah and her Sisters*) of the New York buildings that you love. I like the idea very much, but I have the feeling that if you lived in a country where people had never heard of television, including yourself, you would not have done the shots like that.

WA: This I don't know. It's too difficult to question. It's too hypothetical.<sup>21</sup>

It is in this sense of a television 'cancer' that Godard refers to and reworks the title of Jacques Rivette's earliest critical article, 'Nous ne sommes plus innocents' ('We are no longer innocent')<sup>22</sup> Rivette's article refers to the thorough steeping of the Nouvelle Vague in a knowledge of film history, but Godard now appropriates it to argue that all potential innocence is intrinsically tainted *a priori* by a nefarious television-effect.<sup>23</sup> Godard suggests that the impact of the televisual context spares no-one and ripples out through all films: the desire and energy of those involved in filmmaking has largely evaporated, and the widespread diminution in the quality of films has lowered standards, aims and results for all those involved in film production, even the work of those conscious of, and alert to, the process and its effects. The inevitable result, as Godard has consistently argued, is a situation where the average mediocre mainstream film is less good than its equivalent before the television era.

On ne fait pas les films qu'on est capable de faire. Mocky ne fait pas les films qu'il est capable de faire. Verneuil oui, et même lui, à son niveau, commence à descendre.<sup>24</sup>

(We don't make the films that we're capable of making. Mocky doesn't make the films that he's capable of making. Verneuil does, and even he, at his level, is starting to go downhill.)

In conjunction with this notion of a kind of rapidly escalating debilitating cultural contagion – Godard, never one to shy away from a provocative metaphor – appropriates perhaps the most emotive one available: that cinema has been occupied by television, both economically and aesthetically.<sup>25</sup> If the cinema is occupied, then those who do not resist are – and Godard gives the term its full force as this critique develops across the early 1980s from *Changer d'image* (1982) to *Soft and Hard* – collaborators.

The 1980s and 1990s see the emergence of a further facet of

Godard's critique: the lamenting of widespread cultural amnesia and, specifically, a loss of memory regarding the history of the cinema, even very recent history. *King Lear* is situated 'after Chernobyl', a formula we might elaborate along the lines of 'after the catastrophic and irreversible mutation engendered by television'. Godard's mumbled anglophone voice-off in *Lear* makes the point explicitly: 'This was after Chernobyl. We live in a time in which movies and art do not exist. They have to be reinvented'. In *Deux fois cinquante ans de cinéma français*, commissioned by the British Film Institute, Godard and Miéville wonder aloud what interest the State might have in organizing a centennial celebration in the first place, and observe dryly that it is not the centenary of the invention of the cinema that is being celebrated, but one hundred years since it was institutionalized, commercialized, and since audiences were charged for the privilege of watching films being projected. Those interviewed in the course of this film have virtually no knowledge of the icons of French film history. The viewer is introduced to employees of the hotel in which the film is shot and comes to realize through them that all films have quickly blurred into an indistinguishable morass of 'cinema history', in which the traces of the passionate polemics which informed the debates in *Les Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s, for instance, have disappeared entirely beneath a homogenized morass of 'old films' lodged in the popular psyche. As Serge Daney suggested, all sense of chronology is dissolving, while, at the same time, all old cinema films have begun to acquire a similar look, their differences less marked than their general similarity:

With the triumph of the audiovisual media, 'cinematic' films are beginning to all look alike. Yet, contrary to what must have been the case for the Nouvelle Vague, it's more and more difficult today to organize this impressive mass of films into a linear history. The feeling of time – with a before and after – has changed.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Daney in conversation with Godard in 'Godard makes (H)stories: interview with Serge Daney' in Bellour and Bandy (eds) *Jean-Luc Godard* pp. 159–67. 159. Originally published as 'Godard fait des histoires' in *Liberation* 26 December 1988 pp. 24–7.

An indication of Godard's growing conviction of the effect of television on the audience can be clearly gauged from a brief consideration of the representation of the filmgoing experience in his work. In *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (1959), the cinema is a literal place of refuge for Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo), reworked in this same mode in *Une Femme mariée*; a place of escape for the respective refugees, but clearly also a place from which to view life at one remove. It is a space of emotional intensity and identification for Nana (Anna Karina) in *Vivre sa vie* (1962), and in Godard's recreation of the viewing experience of the primitive viewer unused to cinema's outsize life-like 're-presentation' in *Les Carabiniers* (1963), the cinematic image is treated as overwhelming and a source of (sexual) fascination. But as early as 1966 (*Masculin Féminin*), the

filming experience is a far from happy one. Paul (Jean-Pierre L  aud) laments the failure of films to measure up to his hopes or desires. The key scene in this survey, however, comes in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. Isabel (Isabel Huppert) asks Paul (Jacques Dutronc) as they stand in the cinema queue whether he really wants to go to the cinema. 'Non, pas vraiment' ('No, not really') is his reply, and they wander off to do something else. The context has entirely changed. going to the cinema is no longer a source of wonder or object of desire, just another possibility within the spectrum proposed by the leisure industry.

If the Sonimage work attempts to render visible the process of this mutation, then Godard's work across the 1980s seeks to explore and stake out the terrain of the specifically cinematic, constantly chasing the question 'What is cinema?' in the televisual age. What was cinema, what has been lost, and what traces remain of uniquely cinematic forms which might be retrieved? Harvey's essay takes as its point of departure Bazin's question (which, in truth, is more Godard's question, if we base ownership on the number of times it is used in critical articles), 'What is cinema?' What, she asks, has constituted the specificity of the cinema as site of expression, communication and reception? Her answer, in a nutshell: if we are surrounded by channels of information, then the cinema gives us 'information with attitude'<sup>27</sup>, presented in an intense communal way. Her essay sets out to re-evaluate the semiotic premiss to much of film studies through a reconsideration of Bazin, and to insist on the enchantment and power of the experience of viewing a film in a darkened cinema with an audience of strangers. It is this element of the 'extraordinary within the ordinary', 'significance that is present without words', the intensity of emotion, the special relation between the viewer and the image ('experience that seems to make time stand still or to take place outside of time') which Harvey identifies as eluding the semiotic paradigms that have dominated film studies for three decades.<sup>28</sup> As such, her essay echoes and accompanies Godard's project across the 1980s: how to isolate and insist on the specific otherness of the cinematic experience? Much of Godard's work of the 1980s and 1990s turns reflexively on the question of what exceeds analysis and rational explanation, a theme addressed directly, and given a religious spin, through the quest to represent the mystery of the Virgin birth in *Je vous salue, Marie/Hail Mary* (1985).

Raymond Bellour's *rapprochement* of the cinema theatre to a church comes close to characterizing its special status as a place.<sup>29</sup> The cinema as social event, its separation from the home and family, the darkened theatre, the huge moving images, and the specific fascination that the convergence of such circumstances engender, all constitute the terms of what Godard understands by cinema, and the parameters of which he sought to trace in his film, television and video work from *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* to *King Lear*. Where the

<sup>27</sup> Harvey, 'What is cinema?' p. 250.

<sup>28</sup> These three short quotations are from *ibid.* p. 233.

<sup>29</sup> Bellour, '(Not) just an other filmmaker' p. 215.

television set is cast as a domestic appliance, its audience uniform and atomized within the home and the context of the family – *une affaire de famille* (a family affair), as formulated in *Avant et après*, episode 6b of *Six fois deux* – a prime characteristic of cinema identified by Godard (in *Meeting Woody Allen*) is that of its transgressive promise:

I think that entering the cinema theatre is to liberate oneself from the permission of mummy and daddy. Whilst with television, daddy and mummy are in the room next door from the outset, or in the same city with the same television set, so it's very different from going to the theatre. I mean the liberty to enter the dark room. . .<sup>30</sup>

**30** As with the previous quotation from the soundtrack of *Meeting Woody Allen* Godard's words are here part transcribed part translated

Roland Barthes's magnificent short essay, 'Leaving the movie theatre', captures this opposition very clearly

In this darkness of the cinema (anonymous, populated, numerous – oh, the boredom, the frustration of the so-called private showings!) lies the very fascination of the film (any film). Think of the contrary experience on television, where films are also shown, no fascination; here the darkness is erased, anonymity repressed; space is familiar, articulated (by furniture, known objects), tamed: the eroticism – no, to put it better, to get across the particular kind of lightness, of unfulfillment we mean: the eroticization of the place is foreclosed: television doomed us to the Family, whose household instrument it has become – what the hearth used to be, flanked by its communal kettle.<sup>31</sup>

**31** Roland Barthes 'Leaving the movie theatre' in Barthes *The Rustle of Language* trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986) pp. 345–9. 346. First published as 'En sortant du cinéma' *Communications* no. 23 (1975) pp. 104–7.

**32** Godard 'L'art a partir de la vie' p. 16. Godard developed this thesis in written form in his preface to Pierre Braunberger's *Cinemamemoire* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou/Centre Nationale de la Cinematographie 1987) pp. 9–13.

**33** Formulated in the untranslatable: 'toute entree dans une salle est une sortie du spectateur de chez lui' in Jean-Luc Godard 'Tout Seul' François Truffaut *Les Cahiers du cinema* (December 1984) François Truffaut special issue. In *Godard par Godard* pp. 612–13. 612.

Godard has repeatedly equated the death of cinema with the death of the specificity of the site of its projection and reception: 'le cinéma disparaît quand il ne sera plus projeté'<sup>32</sup> ('the cinema will disappear when it's no longer projected'). The role of projection in Godard's schema is crucial, and it is against the backdrop of the disappearance of projection that claims that the cinema is in fact quite vibrant and 'healthy' (and simply available through other forms, such as video cassettes) is refuted outright. The concept of *projection*, we should note, is heavy with resonances, figuring the intermeshing of the physical projection of the cinematic image with the interpretative work of 'making sense': as Godard has suggested, every entry into the cinema represents an 'exit' on the part of the viewer (literally, in the sense of leaving home, and figuratively in the sense of the projection of self into the film).<sup>33</sup> If television projects nothing, according to Godard, it is simply because it has no *project*. Such slippages and wordplay through which Godard's critical discourse operates are generally received with considerable scepticism. But here his meaning could hardly be plainer: where cinema set itself the project of constructing and reflecting an image worthy of life, an image through which the injuries of life might be

'redeemed' or 'resurrected' (to use the metaphors insisted on by Godard for over a decade), television merely broadcasts *programmes*. And what is programmed first and foremost is the point of consumption, the position of the viewer. Godard returns again and again to this notion that television constructs nothing but programmes and spectators ('on fabrique des programmes et des téléspectateurs'<sup>34</sup> ['it constructs programmes and television viewers']) Many interviews with Godard in the 1980s revolve around the opposition of project/projection to television programming, and it works its way into his *oeuvre* via its extended discussion in *Soft and Hard*

Painting, the novel, and music were already projected in space, or in time, but the cinema was projected in a recognizable form, that of visual representation. Thus the 'I' was projected and magnified, it could get lost, but the idea could be found again, there was a sort of metaphor. With television, on the contrary, television no longer projects anything, it projects us, it projects us, and so we no longer know where the 'subject' is. In the cinema, in the idea of the screen, or in Plato's cave, there was an idea of 'project'. Besides, projection (in other languages it's perhaps something else), but in French: project, projection, subject. One has the impression with television that, on the contrary, we receive it and are subjected to it, that we are the King's subjects, or something like that.

### Revisioning Godard

I would now like to suggest a few provisional remarks on the implications of Godard's view of the death of cinema for a re-reading of the successive phases of his *oeuvre*. Accompanying Godard's polemic, and particularly his critique of the obliteration of cinema through the creeping television-effect, is a romanticization of the period of his early work. In critical writings and works, and especially in 'Une Histoire seule' (Chapter 1B of *Histoire(s)*), Godard constantly idealizes the 1960s (that is, roughly, from *A bout de souffle* to *Week-end*) as a period of unhampered creative freedom, of innovation and experimentation. Furthermore, this reading is reinforced by critical orthodoxy: Godard's films of this period have come to represent a certain form of cinema, European art cinema in its pure state, before the angry gate-crashing of the sociopolitical (in the guise of May 68) or the eruption of television. Thus Godard evokes the 1960s as a lost era of cinematic freedom when 'la magie existait encore' ('when the magic still existed'), as he wrote in his forward to Truffaut's collected letters.<sup>35</sup> But this reading is highly problematic in its over-simplicity for two principal reasons. Firstly, as Colin MacCabe observed in 1996 on the re-release of *Le Mépris*,

<sup>34</sup> Godard in: *Travail amour-cinema* (interview with Catherine David) *Le Nouvel Observateur* 20 October 1980 pp 65–70. In *Godard par Godard* pp 49–58 450

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Luc Godard: *Avant propos* in Gilles Jacob and Claude de Givray (eds) *François Truffaut Correspondance* (Renens: Hatier 1988) pp 7–8 7

36 Colin MacFabe *Le Mépris*  
*Sight and Sound* vol. 6 no. 9  
 (1996) pp. 55–6

all of Godard's films, despite their dynamism and energy, are infused with a melancholic pessimism, not least in relation to the future of the cinema itself.<sup>36</sup> And secondly, the emergence of television accompanies these films, rapidly becoming a highly visible presence, invading the cinema image from within from *Masculin Féminin* onwards (Godard's first film to treat television extensively, coinciding with his acquisition of a television set for the first time). Indeed the television monitor is already present in Godard's third feature, *Une Femme est une femme* (1961). With hindsight, and in the context of our prior knowledge that the cinema will 'die' (sic), the myth of Godard's 1960s art cinema as somehow pure or emblematically cinematic seems increasingly untenable.

I suggest, rather, that Godard's first period – that of 'coming to cinema', the cultivation of a neo-Hollywoodian vision through a European art sensibility – spans the period of his early critical work at the beginning of the 1950s, includes the early short films, and terminates precisely around 1963 with the vision contained in *Le Mépris* of the decline of cinema (a decline traditionally read as referring exclusively to the passing of the heyday of Italian cinema). More radically still, we might postulate that the end of this time of cinematic invention is *A bout de souffle*. Rather than 'le pouvoir de tout faire'<sup>37</sup> ('the power to do everything') – as Godard viewed his work of this period and the context in which that work took place – such a re-reading situates *A bout de souffle* less as the founding moment of a new form of cinema than as the *endpoint* of cinema itself. In this light, the second phase of Godard's 1960s work would then be the essayistic and polemical work of the mid to late 1960s, increasingly fragmentary in its semiconscious mimicry of the forms of television which accompany and soon engulf it, and the rest of cinema along with it.

37 Godard in Jean-Luc Godard  
 s'explique (interview with  
 Raymond Bellour) *Les Lettres*  
*Françaises* no. 1029 (1964)  
 pp. 8–9, 9

The period of the Groupe Dziga Vertov was short-lived – three years. The collaborative films of this era have been accorded an importance that far outweighs their substance. As is well known, much has been written on the status of these films as examples of how to make, or not make, a political film. Within the framework of the disappearance of cinema as an important or distinctive cultural form, they announce, quite simply, a new world-space circumscribed by and defined through television, concerns which will culminate in the far more important *Sonimage* work. Commentators have tended to over-obediently concentrate on what Godard, Jean-Henri Roger, and later Jean-Pierre Gorin, stated as their overt aim: 'to make political films politically'. But what critics overlook is the most pressing aspect of these fascinating, if often obnoxious, films: they were not only produced by television (foreign television companies), but are on and about television. If Godard's stated claim of this period was to foreground the political, then the unconscious of the films reveals the same underlying problematic: the threat to cinema

through the multiplication of televisual imagery, the dominance of television in defining the rules of the game for cinematic production, and the profound shift in the consumption habits and patterns of audiences increasingly exposed to televisual forms and codes. Virtually all the films are very overtly on television, from the polemical dissection of television in *Le Gai savoir* (1968), through *British Sounds* (1969), *Pravda* (1969), *Luttes en Italie* (1969), and *Vladimir et Rosa* (1971). A re-reading of the Groupe Dziga Vertov work in this light is well overdue: ostensibly submerged in the class struggle, Godard never loses sight of his point of departure and key concern: what is (or was) cinema?

This rapid repositioning of earlier phases of Godard's *oeuvre* would suggest a reassessment of Godard and the Nouvelle Vague as less the saviours of cinema (with a shot of adrenalin into the French 1950s 'Cinema of Quality' tradition) than as the endpoint of cinema, or at least the beginning of the end. The Nouvelle Vague may have been 'les enfants du langage cinématographique'<sup>38</sup> ('the children of cinematographic language'), even 'les premiers cinéastes à savoir que Griffith existe'<sup>39</sup> ('the first filmmakers to know that Griffith existed'), but Godard's entire *oeuvre* is above all profoundly *televisual* (against television, marked by television, engaging with television). Rather than embodying the cinema, Godard, I suggest, embodies, precisely, the televisual era, the age in which a yearned-for version of Europe-Hollywood evaporated as soon as it arrived.

Godard, too, perhaps paradoxically in view of the romanticization of the Nouvelle Vague period suggested above, has arrived at this same conclusion: whilst appearing to represent the rebirth of cinema, the Nouvelle Vague denotes the beginning of the end, 'une espèce de moment décisif que l'on a pris pour initial, mais qui était final'<sup>40</sup> ('a sort of decisive moment that we took to be the beginning of something, but which was the end'), or, simply, 'C'est la fin du cinéma qu'on a représenté' .<sup>41</sup> ('It is the end of cinema that we represented' )

In conclusion, whether we ultimately accept or reject Godard's models of the death(s) of cinema, the multiple 'deaths' turn on the very precise positions I have attempted to outline here. Furthermore, whether we have any desire or not to engage in a hypothetical dialogue with Godard on this issue, I suggest that we have already been doing so, for at least the past decade. Much of the influential recent talk of the deterioration, decay or death of cinema can be traced back to Godard – and specifically to the 'irreversible/catastrophic TV mutation' – and to the mischievous provocations thrown out in his work since the early 1980s. It was in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* in 1982 that he first talked openly of the cinema being on the verge of death, a notion which, as we have seen, has its roots in the attempts to register and map out the impact of television on cinema in the 1970s. But what I have also hoped to demonstrate

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, 'Trois mille heures de cinéma', *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 184 (1966). In *Godard par Godard*, pp. 291–5, 294.

<sup>39</sup> Godard in Jean-Luc Godard (interview with Jean Collet, Michel Delahaye, Jean-André Fieschi, André S. Labarthe and Bertrand Tavernier), *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 138, Nouvelle Vague special issue (1962), pp. 20–39, 21. Anthologized as 'Entretien', in *Godard par Godard*, pp. 9–24.

<sup>40</sup> Godard in 'Cultivons notre jardin', Une interview de Jean-Luc Godard (interview with François Alberay), *Cinemaction* no. 52, special issue devoted to Godard, edited by René Predal, *Le Cinéma selon Godard* (1989), pp. 81, 9, 82.

<sup>41</sup> Godard in 'Entretien avec Jean-Luc Godard' (interview with Hélène Merrick), *La Revue du cinéma* no. 434 (1988), pp. 51, 51.

is that Godard's critical discourse – and here we see a remarkable consistency across his career – is made up of an unstable shifting morass of ideas elided and articulated in a single utterance or image. 'Death' is exploited as a multiple metaphor, and when Godard talks of the death of cinema, each of the successive deaths I have outlined rather schematically here are invoked simultaneously. If we are able to untangle the constituent layers that feed this metaphor, we should remain alert to the fact that when we come face to face with the idea of the 'death of cinema' in Godard's work – and nowhere more potently and provocatively than in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* – we are confronted with a deliberate explosion of dense, multiple and often contradictory meanings.



# *Histoire(s) du cinéma: a select bibliography*

## **Jean-Luc Godard texts, interviews, lectures**

Jean-Luc Godard *Histoire(s) du cinéma* Volumes I–IV (Paris: Gallimard/Gaumont 1998)

Alain Bergala (ed.) *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* Volume II: 1984–1998 (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma 1998)

Jean-Luc Godard *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Albatros 1980)

Cultivons notre jardin: une interview de Jean-Luc Godard: interview with François Albera *Cinemaction* no. 52 special issue: edited by René Predal *Le Cinéma selon Godard* (1989) pp. 14–17

Godard fait des histoires: interview with Serge Daney *Liberation* 26 December 1988 pp. 24–7. In *Godard par Godard II* pp. 161–73. Republished in English as: Godard makes (hi)stories: interview with Serge Daney: trans. Georgia Gurrieri in Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy (eds) *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image 1974–1991* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art 1992) pp. 159–67

Jean-Luc Godard: A propos de cinéma et d'histoire *Trafic* no. 18 (1996) pp. 28–32. In *Godard par Godard II* pp. 401–5

## **Writing on *Histoire(s) du Cinéma***

*Art Press* (France) hors série (*Le Siècle de Jean-Luc Godard/Guide pour Histoire(s) du cinéma*) November 1998

Jacques Aumont *Amnésies* (Paris: POL 1999)

Jacques Aumont: La Mort de Dante *Cinémas* (Canada) vol. 8 nos. 1–2 special edition on: Cinéma et Melancolie: edited by Denis Bellemare (1997) pp. 125–45

Jacques Aumont: Beaute: fatal souci: note sur un épisode des *Histoire(s) du cinéma* *Cinematheque* no. 12 (1997) pp. 17–24

Jean-Louis Leutrat: *Histoire(s) du cinéma*: ou comment devenir maître d'un souvenir *Cinematheque* no. 5 (1994) pp. 19–24

Dominique Paini: Un musée pour le cinéma: créateur d'aura (sic) The cinema museum and aura *Art Press* (French bilingual edition) no. 221 (1997) pp. 28–33

Jonathan Rosenbaum: Bande-annonce pour les *Histoire(s) du cinéma* de Godard *Trafic* no. 21 (1997) pp. 5–18  
Translated as: Trailer for Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* *Vertigo* no. 7 (1997) pp. 13–20

Jonathan Rosenbaum: Godard in the nineties: an interview, argument, and scrapbook *Film Comment* vol. 34 no. 5 (1998) pp. 52–63

Michael Temple: It will be worth it *Sight and Sound* vol. 8 no. 1 (1998) pp. 20–3

Une machine à montrer l'invisible: conversation avec Bernard Eisenschitz à propos des *Histoire(s) du cinéma*: interview by Charles Tesson *Les Cahiers du cinéma* no. 529 (1998) pp. 52–6

James S. Williams: Beyond the cinematic body: human emotion vs. digital technology in Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*: in Scott Brewster and John Joughin (eds) *Thinking the Inhuman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press forthcoming 1999)

James S. Williams and Michael Temple: Jean-Luc Godard: images, words, histories *Dalhousie French Studies* no. 45 (1996) pp. 99–110

Michael Witt: L'image selon Godard: théorie et pratique de l'image dans l'œuvre de Godard des années 70 à 90: in Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, Gilles Delavaud and Marie-Françoise Grange (eds) *Jean-Luc Godard et le métier d'artiste* (Paris: L'Harmattan [Actes du colloque de Cersyl] forthcoming 1999)

Michael Witt: Qu'était-ce que le cinéma: Jean-Luc Godard? An analysis of the (cinemas) at work in and around Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*: in Elizabeth Ezra and Susan Harris (eds) *Visual Culture and French National Identity* (Oxford: Berg forthcoming 2000)

Michael Witt: On Gilles Deleuze on Jean-Luc Godard: an interrogation of la méthode du ENTRE *Australian Journal of French Studies* vol. 36 no. 1 (1999) special issue on French cinema pp. 110–24

## reviews

### review:

Ian Aitken (ed.), *The Documentary Film Movement: an Anthology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, 261pp.

Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (eds), *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998, 488pp.

Alan Rosenthal (ed.), *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*. Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999, 387pp.

Derek Paget, *No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/Docudrama on Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, 237pp.

### MYRA MACDONALD

As British journalists fret over the recent appearance of the 'docu-soap' and confusingly condense some longstanding documentary practices within a misleadingly singular concept of 'fakery', uncertainties about the essence of documentary prevail. History is a recurrent resource for academic attempts at clarification. Ian Aitken's *The Documentary Film Movement: an Anthology* reminds us that category debates are as old as the genre itself. Within the British movement, as this anthology demonstrates, disputes tended to revolve around the role of 'the poetic' and 'the aesthetic' in films purporting to document actuality. While Aitken posits a dialectical opposition between Grierson's aesthetic and didactic aims, Grierson himself, however opportunistically, considered he was producing a smooth and pragmatic blend of poetry and message. In *English Cinema Production and the Naturalistic Tradition* (1927), included in

Aitken's collection, he wrote: 'there is every reason to believe that industrial and commercial films require an even greater consideration of visual effects than the average dramatic film. They have indeed little else on which to subsist' (p. 74)

Aitken's anthology combines analysis of the sociohistorical and philosophical contexts in which Grierson and his fellow documentary-makers worked with excerpts from their own writings. While this is valuable and often illuminating, there are two elements of the author's approach that limit the freshness of his contribution. The first is the underplaying of the role of the women members of the British documentary movement. Although Aitken fleetingly addresses this issue (p. 8), his failure to enquire whether their alleged insignificance in the movement was due to their lack of talent or a reluctance to recognize that talent is especially surprising in the light of current knowledge about the part played by Ruby Grierson, in particular, in pioneering the intimate observation of everyday life that was to become a significant strand in the British documentary tradition. The organization of the anthology element of this volume, by documentary-maker rather than along chronological or thematic lines, also at times obscures the developing processes of debate and decision-making about questions of aesthetic practice, and relationships to the avant garde, that Aitken aims to highlight.

A more intensive search for answers to aesthetic questions is to be found in Barry Keith Grant's and Jeannette Sloniowski's excellent collection of textual studies, *Documenting the Documentary*. Consisting largely, and refreshingly, of original essays on documentary films from the 1920s to the 1990s, organized chronologically according to film text, its emphasis on style opens up wider debates, especially about the role of subjectivity in documentary. It also brings to life the complexity of interactions, early in the century, between detailed aesthetic decisions and the formation of templates for documentary objectives. A number of contributions highlight how the introduction of sound, with its novel options of narration, soundtrack and recorded speech, generated a debate that was not merely technological or aesthetic, but driven by, and ultimately constructive of, different visions of the nature of the genre. In an illuminating essay, Charlie Keil describes two potential solutions to filmmakers' anxieties that narrated commentary would overpower image: either 'investing other components of a documentary's style with an immediacy and strength that would signal their own claims to authority and experience', or 'rendering the commentary itself as lyrical, impassioned, contributing to the film's style rather than overwhelming it' (p. 123). In practice, as Keil perceptively remarks at the end of his essay, attempts to balance image and sound led to the development of the interview as a less dictatorial alternative to voiceover narration; but this, in turn, drew the camera away from expressive experimentation to become an

authenticating recorder of the speaker (p. 133).

Keil's piece, taking a cue from Bill Nichols, also includes a reminder that documentary 'voice' is 'not . . . to be restricted to the aural components of a film's style' (p. 121). How documentary can best solve the problem of sustaining the subjective authority of 'ordinary' speech against the power of other aspects of its 'voice' emerges as an important issue for several contributors. As Caryl Flinn remarks in her discussion of Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (1990), granting subjectivity to marginalized groups is not automatically achieved by pointing cameras in their direction (p. 440). Peter Watkins experiments with one solution in his fourteen-and-a-half-hour *The Journey*, shot between 1984 and 1985 and screened publicly in 1987. Scott MacDonald describes Watkins's painstaking efforts to present in full and without editing the reactions of his 'ordinary' respondents to contemporary issues. If this makes for cumbersome and repetitive viewing, a very different form of multivocality, that cuts against the fixed prurience of the 'ethnographic gaze', is discussed in Diane Scheinman's chapter on Jean Rouch's *Les maîtres fous* (1954), an enquiry into the Hauka cult in Accra. Rouch, she argues, achieves plurality of voice, on the model of Bakhtinian dialogism, not through diversity of speakers but through the interactions of music, ambient sound, and images of the possessed (p. 196). A diametrically opposed possibility is explored by Vivian Sobchack in her discussion of Buñuel's *Las Hurdes/Land without Bread* (1932). The manifest inadequacy of the narrator's paternalistic and imperialist commentary, she argues, paradoxically ensures that the spoken-for Hurdanos are at least in part 'given back their subjecthood' (p. 80).

Subjectivity in relation to history is also explored in this collection in three insightful essays (significantly, perhaps, all are by women). Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, writing on Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard/Night and Fog* (1955), Linda Williams on Errol Morris's *Thin Blue Line* (1987) and Julia Lesage on Billops's and Hatch's *Finding Christa* (1991) all explore differing forms of relating past to present, considering in particular whether these documentaries position the viewer – in Flitterman-Lewis's terminology – outside, observing, or inside, within the subjective experience of memory. Linda Williams's essay, a reprint of a previously published article, provides especially penetrating commentary on the capacity of Errol Morris and Claude Lanzmann (director of *Shoah* [1985]) to find 'representational strategies' that could make visible the continuities of the past into the present. She convincingly argues that 'we . . . see the power of the past not simply by dramatizing it, or reenacting it, or talking about it obsessively . . . but finally by finding its traces, in repetitions and resistances, in the present' (p. 387). Similar issues, in a more personalized context, are discussed in Julia Lesage's account of *Finding Christa*, a film made by a mother who gave her five-year-old

daughter up for adoption, and who twenty years later, together with that daughter, reviews her past actions. Although Lesage finds elements of the film ethically problematic, she comments favourably on its sustained attempt, in line with feminist approaches to autobiography, to explore techniques that will break with the reification of selfhood. These three essays, about very different types of film, suggest that fascinating opportunities remain for further work on memory and subjectivity within documentary.

*Documenting the Documentary* is a rich resource of varied approaches and forms of critical engagement. It is an encouraging reminder that textual analysis, in the right hands, takes us through the text to questions of power and political effectivity. My one criticism of this volume is that the index is disappointingly unhelpful to a reader wanting to dip in by theme or topic to such a varied menu. In a volume that is otherwise attentive to its readers' needs (listing, for example, sources for the films and videos discussed), this is a small but niggling omission.

While Alan Rosenthal's *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV* is less innovative than the Grant/Sloniowski collection, it has merits of its own. Focusing on the contentious area of dramatized documentary (most frequently referred to in the USA as docudrama), it brings together a selection of previously published British and US work with contributions from practitioners and journalists. By enabling clear resonances to emerge across these different perspectives, it suggests reassuringly that, in this area of the media at least, creative and critical voices can interact productively with each other.<sup>1</sup> Both academics and practitioners supply examples endorsing the truism (elided from some of the contemporary discussions of 'fakery') that 'the idea of re-creating events for the camera is as old as the movies' (p. 65). More interestingly, they also provide evidence of drama-documentary paradoxically taming the theatricality of real events or chronologies to make them less dramatically implausible for viewers. Derek Paget, drawing on Donald Woods's personal memoir, relates how at least one segment of reality was deleted from Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom* (1987) because it would have appeared too far-fetched to audiences (p. 52), while Michael Baker, the scriptwriter for a docudrama on the Exxon Valdez disaster, confirms that he omitted the real incident of a woman warning a Valdez council meeting of the inevitability of precisely such an accident hours before it happened, since to include this would have drawn charges of fanciful fabrication (p. 220).

Rosenthal's collection is divided into three separable but interrelated parts: definitions and issues; practice and production, and the treatment of history. Although this produces some overlaps and, as Rosenthal himself acknowledges, some debatable decisions about where to insert particular items, it also provides a modest easing of the disadvantage caused by the absence of an index. The third

1 Productive exchange between academics and practitioners was also much in evidence at the Stirling Documentary Conference *Breaking the Boundaries* at the University of Stirling 28–31 January 1999.

section on 'The Quicksands of Politics and History' is designed in part to have an integrative function, but it also throws up fresh issues for debate. The chapters by Sumiko Higashi and Yosefa Loshitsky are especially productive in interrogating Hollywood's traditionally realist mode of investigating history. Sumiko Higashi contrasts Alex Cox's *Walker* (1987) with Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* (1988). *Walker*'s play with time in bringing nineteenth-century colonial adventures into juxtaposition with images of twentieth-century capitalist imperialism baffled contemporary critical reviewers, but achieved the reverberations between past and present discussed in Linda Williams's piece in the Grant/Sloniowski collection. Yosefa Loshitsky's acutely perceptive comparison of Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) registers implicit dissatisfaction with the currently limited terms of a debate about documentary's treatment of history, centring purely on issues of facticity or fictionalization, by ironically pointing out that Lanzmann referred to *Shoah* as a 'fiction of reality' while Spielberg went to considerable pains to simulate contemporary documentary footage. Her analysis echoes the concerns with representation and memory that emerge also in *Documenting the Documentary*: 'unlike *Shoah*, which invokes memory through the oral recollection of personal experience delivered by different witnesses and through the evocation of expressive faces and landscapes, the memory recaptured and "relived" through *Schindler's List* is not an "authentic", "reexperienced" memory but rather a cinema memory produced and recycled by the movie industry' (p. 366). This adds yet another tantalizing dimension to the complexities of unravelling the relationships between film, history and memory.

*Why Docudrama?* exemplifies very clearly the differences between British and US traditions within this genre, with the latter owing more to a biopic tradition foregrounding personal stories and dramas, the former more to a journalistic and public service paradigm. Various contributors underline the US networks' hostility to socially challenging docudramas, even when evidence from unexpected success stories such as *Roots* (1977) might have led to a rethinking of assumptions. Todd Gitlin outlines the role of corporate pressures in sustaining institutional nervousness in his account of the making of *Bitter Harvest*, a 1987 programme made for NBC about the chemical poisoning of cattle in Michigan. Not only did the name of the state have to be omitted, but a mention of the offending PBBs being used as fire retardants in televisions was dropped in deference to RCA, the owners of NBC, who also manufactured television sets. As Alan Rosenthal warns, the trends of US programming are likely to become increasingly infectious across the Atlantic as coproductions increase.

The contrast, and yet the growing symbiosis, between British and US docudramas is also vividly evident in Derek Paget's highly

readable *No Other Way To Tell It: Dramadoc/Docudrama on Television* Offering a useful guide to the terminological quagmire that bedevils categorization of this area of broadcasting (with dramadoc and docudrama emerging as the favoured terms in British and US commentaries respectively), he wisely recommends abandoning obsessive worrying over its hybridity in favour of attending to its generic specificity. Paget cites telling examples of the differences between British and US traditions, including the changes made to the ending of Granada's *Why Lockerbie?* (1990) before its transmission in the USA as *The Tragedy of Flight 103: The Inside Story* (p. 198), and the divergent reactions to Granada/HBO's *Hostages* (1992) in the British and US media (p. 80). Paget also offers insights into the role of legal experts in maintaining the facticity of dramadoc. By probing examples of how this operates, he translates what academic critics more often pose as a tension between competing epistemologies into a pragmatic bargaining process between lawyers, producers and writers. The author's direct contact with several of the key players in British drama-documentary helps to demystify the processes involved and to demonstrate how theory and practice intertwine. For this reason alone, this book will be a valuable text for students and teachers.

Paget is less surefooted in his exploration of the possible 'feminization' involved in the pull towards more personalized and affecting modes of discourse generated from across the Atlantic. Despite acknowledging some possible merit in this argument, his manifest preference for the British tradition reasserts itself in his final, if ambivalent, judgement: 'the evidential and the ethical will need at least to have parity with the affective in the television dramadoc/docudrama of the twenty-first century' (p. 212). This remains a more optimistic vision of the future than the one Todd Gitlin offers in *Why Docudrama?* 'whenever I told executives I was trying to understand how television dealt with social issues, they proceeded to tell me about movies dealing with alcoholism, cancer, drugs, crippling illness, death, and dying' (p. 159). While Paget reserves judgement about the merits of new subgenres of 'trauma dramas' and 'headline docudramas', Gitlin's implicit endorsement of the roughly equivalent term of 'cripflicks' deployed by one 'industry influential' in the USA suggests that the gap between British and US perspectives may not be confined to documentary-makers. To take documentary criticism beyond ping-pong oppositions between 'entertainment' and 'public service sobriety' we need, as some of the most exciting contributions discussed above suggest, a fresh set of questions. We might even want to enquire whether a revival of 'the poetic' (albeit in non-Griersonian form) is beyond realistic contemplation.

## **review:**

**Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson (eds), *Back In The Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*. London: British Film Institute, 1998, 218pp.**

**Stephen Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies*. London: The Athlone Press, 1998, 282pp.**

## **EDWARD GALLAFENT**

A quarter of a century ago, Jack Nachbar introduced a collection of essays on the Western<sup>1</sup> on a note of high confidence. Echoing André Bazin's 'the American Film Par Excellence',<sup>2</sup> he could claim that Westerns are 'thus far the single most important American story form of the twentieth century'.<sup>3</sup> In comparison to this, Ed Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson's introduction to a collection of new essays, marked even in its title as a kind of relaunch of a subject forgotten or put aside, seems to be a site for a suggestive set of intersecting anxieties.

That a collection of essays on the Western now needs to justify its existence seems to be a response to two current conditions. One is a matter of product and audience: the fact that as a type of mainstream Hollywood filmmaking the Western is in 'a decline from which it has never recovered' (p. 1). This phrase, acknowledging an assumption that the commercial decline of the Western is probably, but not certainly, terminal, distinguishes this shift from the disappearance of, for example, silent cinema as a mainstream form. The other condition is 'changing cultural attitudes, especially in terms of sexuality and ethnic difference' (p. 1), which mark off the present from the pre-1960 period. We might say that this covers both



the student who would rather see *True Lies* than *Geronimo*, and the critic who would rather write on *The Big Sleep* than *Red River*

So the case is thought of as doubly disabling. The Western does not easily present a route by which audiences or students of film can be led back from the modern examples of a type to the classical ones – as they might be from John Dahl to Edward Dmytryk in the case of film noir. And if Westerns are conventionally seen to purvey ‘a white male, indeed a middle-aged white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male view of the world’ (p. 3), it would seem hard to re-integrate them into the concerns of contemporary film studies. The crucial element here may be the way in which these points are related. The commercial decline seems somehow to relate to the anxiety about the critical status, as if the fact that Westerns are no longer made implicitly questions the intelligibility of the great films of the earlier period to a modern audience.

The collection offers two responses to this. One is to pose the wider cultural context of the West itself, in terms of music, fashion, painting, and both fiction and documentary television, where commercial popularity seems much more assured. The other is to raise questions about the ways in which the Western – and the West – have been subject to recent debates around national identity, historical narratives and the reinterpretation of the role of the Native American. The collection begins and ends with essays on Native Americans, opening with two discussions of their representation in film and photography, and concluding with two pieces on the history of the West.

Within this frame are a number of essays which look at specific, local issues of Western film history. Noel Carroll on four Westerns in which American mercenaries find themselves in Mexico, Gaylyn Studlar on the Westerns (made between 1915 and 1920) of Douglas Fairbanks, Snr, Richard Abel on the Westerns of 1907–1910; Peter Stanfield on singing cowboys and, specifically, Gene Autry, William Boddy on the brief heyday of television Westerns in the late 1950s, Tassilo Schneider on the German Western of the 1960s, and Colin MacArthur on the use of the iconography of the Western in magazine advertising between 1930 and 1950.

It is clear from this list that a decision has been taken to concentrate on areas outside the range of what has previously been discussed. With the single exception of a piece by Jean-Louis Leutrat and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, which interestingly argues for the interconnectedness of Ford’s uses of the Monument Valley in his films, the temptation for students of Ford, Hawks or Mann will be to feel that there is little or nothing for them here. This would be a pity, for all of these essays offer detailed and valuable scholarly work, mapping underresearched areas. Perhaps a limitation of the short essay form is that while the authors helpfully situate the materials in the contexts of production and of the popular cultural

forms and debates of their day, their use of these largely obscure film texts is often limited to looking at commentary or plot summary. For example, it is argued that both the Douglas Fairbanks Westerns and the 1950s television Westerns address an embattled masculinity in the America of their times, but more space to expand on the visual details of specific films might have been helpful in unscrambling the versions of what, in these different decades, masculinity was understood to be.

Of the essays that are partly or wholly on Native Americans, Steve Neale's deals most directly with the more familiar canon of Western film, helpfully mapping out the politics of the various cycles of 'pro-Indian' Westerns from the 1940s to the present. Edward Countryman and Rick Worland contribute an essay that is essential reading for those concerned with the relation of the Western to different versions of American historiography, to which Pearson's survey of recent representations of the Custer myth on American television serves as an interesting illustration. Finally, two articles raise major subjects for discussion which can barely be more than tantalising in this brief form. Buscombe on 'Photographing the Indian', and Jane Marie Gaines and Charlotte Cornelia Herzog on Western costume. Here, perhaps, there is most cause to regret that the arguments could not be more copiously supported by illustrations – happily not a problem with Colin MacArthur's piece on advertising, which is well documented through four colour plates.

The change of name, in December 1991, of the Custer Battlefield National Monument to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is mentioned twice in these essays. Perhaps there is an impulse in this collection to do something analogous for the Western, an act of redefinition and re-emphasis. But as Countryman and Worland remind us, the US is 'a society that currently finds more fragmentation than coalition in the term "multi-culturalism"' (p. 194).

Stephen Prince's *Savage Cinema* could be seen as sharing with Buscombe's and Pearson's anthology a sense of dealing with material that is unpopular, or difficult to address, in the current climate. Prince looks at Sam Peckinpah's work from the late 1960s onwards, concentrating largely on *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *Straw Dogs* (1972), *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973) and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), which he regards as the director's last major film. The book is not organized around discussions of individual films; although many sequences and moments from these four are analyzed, and there are comments on the later work, Prince considers all this as part of a developing discussion of the filming of violence, in which he looks at both the origins, the mechanics and the contexts of Peckinpah's images of assault on the body.

In discussion of Peckinpah's craft – his debt to Kurosawa and the mechanics and intentions of his editing style – Prince offers a useful

corrective to any lingering image of the director, at least in this period, as sloppy or careless. He interestingly compares the shot lists for moments of montage in *The Wild Bunch* with the finally edited product. In the book's most detailed analysis, he anatomizes the notorious rape sequence in *Straw Dogs*, breaking it down shot by shot in order to argue how Peckinpah directs our perspective. It is valuable to have this exposition, although it raises a question. Prince notes that some shots are three frames long and that this is 'below the minimum duration a viewer needs to recognise the image on screen' (p. 80). This is referred to as 'subliminal', and he comments that 'there is little experimental evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of subliminal editing' (p. 80). He argues that the film makes associations between figures 'at this 'subliminal' level' (p. 80), but it remains unclear what place such connections can have in any analysis of how the film works for an audience.

Prince recounts that Peckinpah 'told Barbara Walters that it was not in his power to present constructive values in his work' (p. 146), and the argument of the book supports this, presenting a view of Peckinpah as 'an intelligent and articulate filmmaker' but one who presents a series of worlds of 'overwhelming negativity' (p. 210). While the case for this negativity is cogently made in many respects, what is less certain is the argument that this very quality can be viewed as implying its opposite. Perhaps Prince's language records the difficulty here. He writes of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* that it contains 'affirmations of heart and spirit that are implicitly pointed to by the film through their almost total absence' (p. 192). In 'implicitly pointed to' and 'almost' the hesitation is evident.

Prince concludes with a chapter relating Peckinpah's violence to that of recent and current Hollywood filmmaking. While it is possible to admire the combative impulse behind this, it is subject to the danger of the wide-ranging survey, as if all current screen violence worked in the same terms. Perhaps these arguments can only be successfully framed around detailed discussion of particular films, for which there is not sufficient space here. A filmography of the Peckinpah films discussed in detail would also have been helpful.

The central image of this book, offered on its cover and in variations in its chapter headings, is a fittingly disturbing one – the appalled, terrorized face of Amy (Susan George) in the rape sequence from *Straw Dogs*, an icon of the problem of our participation in cinema. Prince's book is a reminder of the difficulty, and the power, of some of the American cinema of the 1970s.

# (Dis)engaging characters: a response to Lynne Pearce's review

MURRAY SMITH

It is not the least of the pleasures of reviewing that one has the opportunity to air one's own views – and draw attention to one's own work – on the subject in question. Lynne Pearce must know this pleasure well, since she misses no opportunity to indulge in it in her review of my book *Engaging Characters. Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (hereafter, *EC*).<sup>1</sup> Against the pleasures afforded by reviewing, however, must be set the responsibilities it incurs, such as describing and situating accurately the work under review. Pearce's review is severely deficient in this respect. The review is so strongly coloured by Pearce's agenda that many of the arguments of *EC* are distorted and, just as importantly, the *contexts* of these arguments are obscured (a particularly fine irony, as we will see). I want to take the opportunity in this response, therefore, to set the record straight on a number of matters, as well as to advance debate on a number of genuine issues arising from confusions in Pearce's review.

1 Reviewed in *Screen* vol. 37 no. 4 (1996) pp. 415–18. A considerable chunk of the review is given over to a description of Pearce's research for (what was at the time) a forthcoming book of her own.

2 Pearce also muddles the role and origins of the distinction between central and acental imagining suggesting that my use of the distinction is derived from Noel Carroll (p. 418). However, I borrow the concept not from Carroll but Richard Wollheim (p. 76) and use it to criticize Carroll rather than lend support to him. Pearce's misascription thus manages to distort both Carroll's and my own argument.

## Emotions, attitudes and 'excess'

Pearce complains that although the book is partly about emotion, I limit myself largely to the discussion of two 'emotions', sympathy, and its opposite, antipathy. While these notions do receive a lot of attention, they are never described as emotions *per se*.<sup>2</sup> Rather, they are *evaluative attitudes* which underlie emotions of diverse sorts (as

is clearly stated on pp 62–3 and 188). A corollary of this view is that any time one talks about a spectator having a sympathetic or antipathetic attitude towards a character in a specific context, this will imply a *particular* emotion or emotions: a sympathetic attitude might result in a spectator feeling anger, joy, fear, pride, envy or a host of other specific emotions. So specific emotions are usually implied even where they are not spelt out (as they nevertheless often are). A related objection voiced by Pearce is that the sympathy–antipathy dyad works simply as an opposition or ‘dialectic’ (p 416). However, I argue in *EC* that sympathy and antipathy are to be understood as the two poles of a continuum, not two mutually exclusive states. For example, in Chapter 6, which is concerned in part with surveying the *range* of ways in which films attempt to shape our emotional reactions, I posit a distinction between ‘Manichaeian’ and ‘graduated’ moral structures. While the ‘Manichaeian’ structure elicits intense, contrasting emotions towards different characters, the graduated structure situates characters within a more finely calibrated spectrum of moral gradations, and thus tends to elicit mixed and qualified emotions.<sup>3</sup>

The two objections – that I only discuss two ‘emotions’ and that these are cast as a simple opposition – are related insofar as they both imply a reductiveness to the enterprise as a whole. I think this charge is wholly unwarranted and arises from a sloppy and casual misreading of the book, the aim of which is to tease out the complexity and variety of both the emotions themselves and the means by which films elicit and mould our emotions, as well as to analyze the vast array of formal possibilities this variety of means makes possible.

Pearce also chastises me for not spelling out sufficiently clearly the ‘theoretical “excess”’ of emotion, a phenomenon which she puts down to the fact that emotions are located ‘in *both* text and audience’ (p.415), and which marks emotions off from ‘meanings’. I did not spell this out because I do not agree with the idea that emotions are excessive (whether in Pearce’s special sense, or in the sense of being extraneous or redundant). Particular emotional responses are – far from being ‘excessive’ – *integral* to the successful functioning of many types of film (horror films need to evoke horror; tragedies, pity and fear). But this does not mean that the emotions themselves are ‘located’ in both texts and audiences. Emotions are things experienced by sentient beings, like humans, not by books or films. Of course texts are centrally involved in the way spectators come to feel emotions; they prompt, guide and constrain those emotions. But then, texts are just as integrally involved in the way spectators ascribe meanings to them; if this is so, why are emotions especially ‘excessive’? Certainly texts *represent* characters and narrators shown to experience emotions. But to say that emotions are somehow situated *in* texts, and to make this claim the

3 Incidentally support for the significance of the basic attitudes of sympathy and antipathy in determining the nature of our emotional responses to fictions can be found in the extensive work of psychologist Dolf Zillman (who uses the parallel terms approval and disapproval). See for example *Mechanisms of emotional involvement with drama* *Poetics* no 23 (1994) pp 45–6 and *The psychology of the appeal of portrayals of violence* in J.H. Goldstein (ed.) *Why We Watch the Appeal of Violent Entertainment* (New York: Oxford University Press 1998) pp 179–211.

warrant for that old warhorse 'excess', just seems like so much mystification: show me a text that has experienced an emotion. Emotions are complex phenomena, but they have been mystified quite enough for the last two thousand years

### **'Positioning' and freedom of response**

Pearce claims that I adopt the concept of 'identification' in my approach to emotional response, and that, by implication, in this respect my argument can be likened to those of psychoanalytic film theorists (pp. 416–7, 418). If *EC* is anything, however, it is a detailed argument regarding the *inadequacies* of the notion of 'identification', whether in an everyday sense or in its more technical, psychoanalytic guises (though this does not even warrant a mention in Pearce's review). Perhaps Pearce thinks that the justification for conflating my approach with that of psychoanalytic theorists is her astounding claim that I believe films 'position' spectators (pp. 416, 418). In the introduction, however, I complain about the 'heavily deterministic rhetoric' of much theory and criticism, citing as an example the claim that films can 'railroad' us into adopting certain attitudes and beliefs (p. 6), and noting that this overlooks entirely the role of the spectator in the creation of meaning. Chapter 2 follows up on this by elaborating an extended critique of the notion of the 'subjected' or 'positioned' spectator, arguing instead for a conception of the 'imaginative spectator' which recognizes the element of freedom in our responses to films. Chapter 5 explicitly denies that films can 'position' us: 'The construal or "appropriation" of a text by a particular spectator . . . may or may not match the interpretation of the film anticipated by the filmmaker' (p. 171). Films are designed to elicit certain kinds of response rather than others; but of course, they can and do fail in this ambition, often, and for a variety of reasons. That is why it is inappropriate to talk of films 'positioning' us, and why I don't.

### **Text and context**

This brings me to the third and most substantial area of dispute touched on by Pearce, the one where the reviewer's axe grinds most noisily: the relationship between text and context. Pearce's sympathies appear to lie with the view that it is at best a diversion, and at worst a delusion, to undertake close analysis, because the meaning of a text is really determined not by its own structures, but by the contexts in which it is received and interpreted. I take it that this is Pearce's view from, for example, her claim that once we take context into account, the 'source of emotion' moves from textual

devices 'to the cultural and historical discourses in which [texts are] produced, consumed and circulated' (p. 416). From this Empyrean viewpoint, any differences between, let us say, psychoanalysis and cognitive theory, can be set aside as trivial, since both are putatively unalloyed 'textualist' approaches.

I don't dispute the idea that the study of specific audiences' responses to texts is a legitimate object of inquiry. What I dispute is that such an approach can actually replace the study of texts themselves; that the study of reception can supplant rather than complement textual studies. To see why this is so, consider the following example (a favourite of John Fiske's). Certain Aborigine communities in Australia construed *Star Wars* as a battle between themselves and white colonialists who had appropriated most of their lands. If we want to understand how and why a Hollywood film appeals to a community so distant from American culture, then the ability of audiences to radically (re-)interpret texts is certainly an important part of the explanation. But does this make the *film* about Aborigines and colonialists? The Aborigine construal of the film in this fashion makes of it an allegory of their own specific social situation, but this is compatible with the highly plausible assumption that they also recognized that the film was, in a literal sense, about characters from 'long ago and far away', not just around the corner.<sup>4</sup>

Faced with the fact that spectators respond to films and other types of text in varied ways, we might be persuaded that the entire notion of a determinate text is a mistaken one, and replace it with the view that texts are constituted by the contexts or 'interpretive communities' in which they are read. This is the view that, it seems, Pearce endorses (see the quote from p. 416 above). There is a deep problem with this perspective, however, which can be captured very simply by the following questions: to what would Pearce and others refer when they claim that Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in this Class?*<sup>5</sup> makes the argument that texts have no determinate meaning? Do they mean merely the text as they construe it? If I interpreted Fish's book as making the same argument as E.D. Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation*<sup>6</sup> – arguing that Fish is simply using a self-implicating strategy of irony which actually drives the reader to recognize the determinacy of texts – how could they deny the equal legitimacy of my construal? No amount of pointing to the text will solve the problem, since everything quoted at me can be re-interpreted along ironic lines. How do we know that we are even talking about the same thing? Within this framework, even the simple act of reference to a text becomes problematic.<sup>7</sup>

One would think that, given the nature of Pearce's criticisms, it would be incumbent on her to address the arguments put forth on context and reception theory in *EC*. So determined is she to create a straw man, however, that she blithely ignores substantial sections where these questions are addressed. For example, Chapter 2 argues

4 A second example: like many people I did not accept the mournful emotional response almost uniformly solicited by media coverage of Diana's death but that does not mean that the mournful stance was not a defining feature of all those broadcasts: that Jenny Bond's sombre intonation and grave expression were not asking me to honour and weep for the People's Princess. On this issue see also David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp. 176–8.

5 Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

6 E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

7 Luckily there is a far more coherent alternative – and that involves making a distinction between: to use Susan Feagin's terms, elicitors (textual features which elicit or invite certain kinds of response) and conditioners (factors such as mood, memory, beliefs, values and background knowledge which affect how one responds and what one responds to). Unfortunately I do not have the space to discuss this further here, but see Susan Feagin, *Reading With Feeling: the Aesthetics of Appreciation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 25.

that cognitivism and reception theory can be seen as alternative, though not necessarily incompatible, responses to psychoanalytic accounts of spectatorship, and that reception theory itself is prone to substituting 'subjection to the text' with 'subjection to an interpretive community'. Or again, Chapter 6 attempts to refine the contrast between text and context by introducing the notion of the *co-text* – the set of values and beliefs implicitly established by the text itself; the context within the text, as it were, which may be more or less congruent with the actual context of viewing. 'Smith is obliged to invoke an extratextual "moral" framework' (p. 416), we are told, as if this were a deeply painful and crushing admission that not everything can be handled as if it were solely created by the text as an autonomous object. However, my recourse to contextual phenomena is not some accidental, embarrassing lapse, but a thread woven into my argument throughout, as I hope the references to *EC* in this response demonstrate. Pearce wants to see textual structure and 'extratextual' factors as necessarily in competition and conflict, but in my view, this establishes an antinomy where there is none.

These oversights draw our attention to an additional, if dubious, attraction of radical reception theory. What is this thing that I insist on referring to as '*Engaging Characters*'? There are only interpretations; in this case, mine and Pearce's. The busy reviewer need not worry about reading an entire book, carefully, including the footnotes; such trivialities as omissions, errors and gaffes can be excused – indeed licensed – by the all-powerful context of the reviewer.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion of the issues raised in this response go to <http://speke.uk.ac.uk/sais/> and follow the links to Staff Writing Online